House of Commons

Foreign Affairs Committee

Disinformation diplomacy: How malign actors are seeking to undermine democracy

Fourth Report of Session 2024–26

HC 703

Foreign Affairs Committee

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Summary

The need for facts and truth has never been more important. Yet the information environment is increasingly being weaponised by malign state actors such as Russia, China and Iran and non-state actors like Daesh to sow distrust, undermine cohesion, and erode confidence in democratic institutions and norms. Although this threat is not a new phenomenon, the scale and sophistication of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is increasingly recognised as an existential threat to democratic societies.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is viewed internationally as a trusted partner, providing essential support in combatting FIMI globally. We welcome the Foreign Secretary highlighting information warfare as a ministerial priority but were dismayed to learn the FCDO's ability to respond is being constrained by insufficient funding. Whilst we recognise the wider pressures on public spending, we call on the Government to increase its coordination with European and other allies and increase its funding for the FCDO's Hybrid Threats Directorate. This will be essential if the Government is to meet the ambitions set out in the National Security Strategy, Strategic Defence Review and its NATO commitment to spend 3.5% of GDP on defence by 2035. Without such investment, malign actors will continue to tighten their grip on the information space, disseminating narratives that advance their world views, leaving the UK to languish behind.

Whilst we welcome the additional £33 million funding being provided to the BBC World Service over the next three years, due to inflation it is likely to be a flat settlement. Therefore, the Government should provide the BBC World Service with a further increased funding settlement, drawn in part from the defence budget, so it can plan, invest, and deliver its services effectively. Without increased funding, the BBC World Service will continue to contract with a diminishing influence. Its loss would significantly diminish the UK's soft power and undermine our ability to counter information warfare.

Although the Committee's remit focuses on scrutinising the FCDO, we were struck when looking at disinformation overseas at the familiar patterns we saw. The UK has been the victim of FIMI and although it is not of the scale we saw elsewhere, we nevertheless learnt how quickly malign actors could

build up their adversarial networks. It led us to ask whether the excellent work being done overseas by the UK to counter FIMI was also happening at home.

While we welcome the Government's initial steps towards a whole-of-society approach, progress has been slow due to fragmented efforts across Whitehall. We therefore call on the Government to enhance its public communications and establish a centralised National Counter Disinformation Centre to improve coordination and response. This approach would complement international examples from allies like Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation and France's Vigilance and Protection against Foreign Digital Interference service (VIGINUM).

We also considered evidence from social media companies, given their potential central role in limiting the dissemination of FIMI. We remain dissatisfied with their actions to combat foreign interference and the lack of transparency around algorithmic systems that can be exploited by malign actors. We call on the Government to amend the Online Safety Act 2023 to ensure social media companies are required to provide algorithmic transparency to safeguard against manipulation.

Finally, we are concerned about the practical difficulties in establishing that FIMI posted on social media platforms was done so at the behest of a foreign power, triggering the foreign interference offence. This has created a high bar for online platforms and the authorities to act and leaves the UK's information space open to malign influence. We urge the Government to conduct an urgent review of this legislation.

1 Introduction

1. In these troubled and unpredictable geopolitical times, trusted information is critical. As the information space becomes ever more saturated and contested, liberal democracies continue to be vulnerable to interference by foreign malign actors who seek to distribute manipulated information to achieve their strategic goal of undermining democratic values and institutions.[1] The fundamental challenge for liberal democracies, like the UK, is how to balance the need to protect democracies from attack whilst not infringing on citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms.

2. Although this is not a new phenomenon, state and non-state actors are increasingly weaponising information to influence opinions and sow division. As such, disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) should be viewed as an existential threat to the UK and its interests overseas.

3. The international community is progressively identifying FIMI as a systemic risk. The UN Global Risk Report found that information manipulation acts as a multiplier for exacerbating threats like conflict and questioned whether the international community was prepared for its potential to "exacerbate geopolitical tensions, societal discord and crisis response challenges".[2] Whilst the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report 2026 ranked misinformation and disinformation as the second most serious global risk in the short term (two years) and fourth most serious global risk in the long term (10 years). They note that the increased distrust in information was driving "increasingly nationalistic narratives".[3]

What is foreign information manipulation and interference?

4. Whilst much of the activity is technically legal, it was clear from the outset that the terminology used to discuss information threats was vast and varies internationally (see Box 1). Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic, Sir William Mather Professor of Russian studies at University of Manchester, explained that "the whole range of terms is a minefield. They are not consistently used

1 University of Nottingham, Bellingcat (DIS0002); Professor Saul Newman (Professor of Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London) (DIS0005)
2 United Nations, United Nations Global Risk Report 2024, 4 July 2025, p.16
3 The World Economic Forum, Global Risks Report 2026, 14 January 2026, p.16

and probably cannot be consistently used."[4] Eliot Higgins, CEO of Bellingcat[5] and Dr Natalie Martin, University of Nottingham also noted that "if we are not clear what we are talking about, it will be harder to combat it."[6] As such, the term foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), the preferred terminology used by the UK Government and European Union, is used throughout.[7]

5. We define FIMI as a pattern of behaviour that threatens, or has the potential to threaten, democratic processes and institutions in a target country. Whilst the activity is technically legal, it is conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner, by state or non-state actors.

Box 1: Terminology used within the Report

1. Algorithm: a mathematical set of rules and instructions that systematically sorts, filters and recommends content for users based on how likely they are to like and interact with it.

2. Bot: a software program which performs an automated, repetitive task imitating a human. Bots are frequently used on social media sites to amplify and promote mis- and disinformation content by manipulating the platforms content algorithm.

3. Coordinated inauthentic behaviour: coordinated efforts by individuals/groups using fake online accounts to manipulate the public debate for a strategic goal, whilst disguising who they are and what they are doing. The term is frequently used by social media platforms as it refers to behaviours not content.

4. Debunking: a process where a piece of manipulated information is identified, analysed and exposed.

5. Deepfake: an image or video that has been altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something which they did not do.

6. Disinformation: false or inaccurate information spread deliberately to manipulate the opinions and actions of others.

7. Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI): a pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes in a target country.

4 Q1 (Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic)
5 Bellingcat is an independent investigative collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists
6 University of Nottingham, Bellingcat (DIS0002)
7 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

Such activity is mostly non-illegal, but is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner, by state or non-state actors within and outside their own territory.

8. Hybrid warfare: use of military and non-military covert and overt methods, to blur the lines between war and peace, sow doubt in the minds of target populations, and destabilise and undermine societies. Methods include disinformation, cyber attacks, economic pressure, and the deployment of regular forces or irregular armed groups. This combines both kinetic and covert actions.

9. Information environment: the system in which information is created, shared and interpreted.

10. Information laundering: the process of taking manipulated information and passing it through a network of websites or social media accounts (placement). The information continues to spread to more credible sources, through bot farms reposting, liking and sharing (layering). Eventually the information is adopted by trusted news sources or disseminated by real social media platform users (integration). Mirrors the system used by malign actors to launder illicit funds.

11. Influence operations: are deliberate efforts to influence an audience or shape outcomes toward specific, defined objectives, using identifiable assets that can be attributed to a particular state or non-state actor.

12. Misinformation: false or inaccurate information spread without malicious intent, although its effects can still be harmful.

13. Prebunking: a proactive process that seeks to rebut manipulated information before it spreads. It trains individuals to critically analyse information to reduce their susceptibility to mis- and disinformation.

14. Propaganda: information designed to manipulate a specific target audience toward a particular behaviour or belief, often as part of a prolonged campaign by a state actor with a political agenda.

15. Sock Puppet: a technique where a fictious identity is created to conceal the true identity of the person or organisation. This allows them to gain access to content on various sites, such as social media platforms or encrypted messaging services, where content is only available with an account.

16. Spamouflage: a disinformation network linked to the People's Republic of China. The word is a portmanteau of "spam" and "camouflage," and describes the network's attempt to covertly spread disinformation within human-interest-style content.

17. Spoofing: a technique which imitates a person or organisation. Political figures and media organisations are frequent targets of spoofing.

18. Troll: a social media user who intentionally antagonises other users by posting inflammatory content. This content can include mis- and disinformation.

This Committee and our inquiry

6. Whilst the Foreign Affairs Committee's primary function is to scrutinise the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns cut across all areas of Government. Responding effectively requires both close coordination with international allies and strong cooperation within and across domestic Government departments. Over the course of this inquiry, the Committee has become increasingly concerned about the UK's domestic resilience to such hybrid threats. Consequently, the Committee held additional evidence sessions to examine the UK's domestic response, and provides further conclusions and recommendations aimed at strengthening the defence of our democratic institutions and processes, informed by lessons learned from overseas.

7. Additionally, we draw attention to the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee's report, *Social media, Misinformation and Harmful Algorithms*, and the Defence Committee's report, *Defence in the Grey Zone*.[8]

8. The Committee launched its inquiry in January 2025 and received 55 pieces of written evidence and held seven oral evidence sessions. Evidence was received from the public, academic experts, international Governments, and the UK Government. The Committee has raised concerns about FIMI on many of its international visits including in France, Belgium, the United States, Romania, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Germany. The Committee is grateful to the British Embassies in each of these locations. The Committee thanks the individuals, government ministers and officials, members of international legislatures, academics and civil society

8 Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, Second Report of Session 2024–25, Social media, Misinformation and Harmful Algorithms, HC 441; Defence Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2024–25, Defence in the Grey Zone, HC 405.

organisations who provided evidence, both formally and informally, to this inquiry. The Committee also visited and were briefed by the British Army's 77 Information Operations Brigade.

2 The Actors

9. Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) threats to UK interests are largely, but not solely, the domain of state actors and their proxies. The most identified state actor conducting FIMI is Russia followed by China and Iran.[9] Whilst the Committee has focused here on Russia, China, Iran for brevity, it should be clear that foreign influence campaigns originate from states globally as well as non-state actors including terrorist organisations (e.g., Daesh) and private military companies (e.g., Wagner Group). Further lone individuals and social media platforms should not be discounted as significant sources of FIMI, with Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic, University of Manchester, noting that "Elon Musk's influence is potentially greater in the UK than that of Russia's."[10]

10. Although we distinguish here between state and non-state actors, by their very nature information operations are designed to be obfuscated and often work in tandem or feed off each other. Dr Jon Roozenbeek, King's College London told the Committee that:

> […] these actors very much try to hide their tracks. Establishing that they are linked to a given state, or a given set of interests, let us say, is often very difficult, because they deliberately try to conceal that.[11]

Russia

11. Russia is ever increasing its use of hybrid warfare across the globe, to interfere and influence populations towards its own neo-imperialist agenda. Its FIMI operations receive significant financing across a widespread and purpose built architecture designed to utilise state and non-state entities to conduct campaigns both overtly and covertly.[12] Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories stated that "this year Russia alone plans to spend €30 million weekly on state propaganda—its own budget proposals admit that—and that is a total of €1.5 billion".[13] However, much of Russia's output is "poor quality, and receives limited authentic interaction online".[14]

9 Q10 (Professor Martin Innes)
10 Q7 (Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic)
11 Q6 (Dr Jon Roozenbeek)
12 Q182 (Stephen Doughty MP)
13 Q182 (Stephen Doughty MP)
14 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

Architecture and techniques

12. The Russian state under President Vladimir Putin has developed a FIMI architecture which operates either publicly through official state channels, including government ministries, Russian Centres for Culture and Science (commonly known as Russian Houses[15]) and intelligence services, and state-controlled entities like RT (formerly Russia Today), Sputnik and the Russian Orthodox Church, and covertly through state-affiliated channels and campaigns such as the Africa Initiative, Doppelgänger and Matryoshka.[16]

13. Media organisations like RT present themselves as if they were a "liberal news outlet" by interspersing legitimate journalism in between disinformation to "maintain the illusion".[17] This enabled RT to continue broadcasting in the UK, before its licence was revoked by Ofcom in July 2022 after it was found to have breached due impartiality rules in the wake of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.[18] However, RT's content continues to be accessible on social media platforms.[19]

14. In 2023, there were widespread claims that France was experiencing a surge in bedbug infestations. It was falsely suggested that the rise in bedbugs was due to arrivals of Ukrainian refugees. In 2024, then Europe Minister Jean-Noël Barrot announced that this content was artificially amplified by Russian-linked accounts on social media in an attempt to undermine support for Ukraine. The story was subsequently carried by UK media, including the BBC, illustrating how even trusted news organisations can, unintentionally, give visibility to disinformation once it has been sufficiently amplified.[20]

15. During the Committee's visit to Berlin it heard that the German Foreign Ministry had reported that Russia was using the online media outlet Red, a supposed platform for independent journalists that has close ties to Russian state media outlet RT, to spread disinformation in Germany with the aim to sow division. Red was operated by AFA Medya, a Turkish media company founded by Hüseyin Doğru. Both AFA Medya and Hüseyin Doğru were sanctioned by the EU in its Seventeenth Russian sanctions package in

15 Russian Houses intend to promote Russian culture, language and education across the world. They are increasingly being recognised as a vehicle for Russian disinformation.

16 Sir William Browder KCMG (CEO; Head at Hermitage Capital Management; Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign) (DIS0031); Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029); EU External Action Service, 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the architecture of FIMI operations, 5 March 2025, p.16

17 University of Nottingham, Bellingcat (DIS0002)

18 Ofcom, Ofcom finds RT in breach of due impartiality rules, 18 July 2022

19 Antisemitism Policy Trust (DIS0004)

20 Le Monde, Bedbug panic was stoked by Russia, says France, 1 March 2024; BBC News, Bedbug panic sweeps Paris as infestations soar before 2024 Olympics, 3 October 2023

May 2025 for creating and spreading disinformation aimed at undermining Germany's democratic political processes. The outlet ceased operations following the imposition of these sanctions.[21]

16. Professor Stephen Hutchings, Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic and Dr Alexander Voronovici, University of Manchester suggest that Russia's information warfare tactics have shifted following Western sanctions and bans on its media networks:

> […] the Kremlin may be shifting towards a 'swamp and distract' strategy, prioritising the generation of large volumes of content over impact, aiming to overwhelm the information space, making it difficult to distinguish legitimate news from propaganda, and triggering the dedication of considerable Western resources to investigate them.[22]

Doppelgänger

17. Since at least February 2022, a vast malign online network of Russian state-backed organisations and people have persistently targeted Ukraine, Europe, the US and beyond with the aim to undermine support for Ukraine following Russia's illegal invasion and attempting to undermine democratic norms and values.[23] This network and their campaigns, attributed to the Social Design Agency, Structura National Technologies and ANO DIALOG, are referred to as Doppelgänger due to their frequent use of imitating media organisations (for example, Le Monde, the Guardian, Der Spiegel, and Fox News) and public institution websites including NATO, the French Ministry of Public Affairs and German Ministry of Interior.[24]

21 Reuters, Germany says Russia using media platform Red to sow discontent, 2 July 2025; European Council, Russian hybrid threats: EU lists further 21 individuals and 6 entities and introduces sectoral measures in response to destabilising activities against the EU, its member states and international partners, 20 May 2025

22 Dr Stephen Hutchings (Professor of Russian Studies at University of Manchester); Dr Vera Tolz (Professor of Russian Studies at University of Manchester); Dr Alexandr Voronovici (Postdoctoral Research Associate at University of Manchester) (DIS0022)

23 EU Disinfo Lab, What is the Doppelganger operation? List of resources, 30 October 2024

24 EU Disinfo Lab, What is the Doppelganger operation? List of resources, 30 October 2024

WELT
POLITIK
Mit den Grünen kam der Ärger
WELT
POLITIK
EU-Politiker wollen nicht in die Realität zurückkehren
Le Point
La droite a remporté
contre la Macron
Répétition générale avant les élections
des patriotes bat les mondiali
Par N.J. avec AFP
Le Point
L'empire de Macron est voué à l'échec
Les habitants des territoires français d'outre-mer sont fatigués de l'inaction du gouvernement et placent leurs espoirs d'une vie meilleure dans la droite
Par N.J. avec AFP
L'info en continu
Toute l'actualité Politique
Macron's empire is falling apart
FAKE
FAKE

Examples of spoofed news websites Le Point (French) and Die Welt (German) websites. Doppelgänger mimics the domain names of the websites. Each image shows a fake news story promoting Russian narratives and vilifying Ukraine and the European Union in an attempt to influence upcoming elections.

Source: EU External Action Service, Doppelganger strikes back: FIMI activities in the content of the EE24, June 2024.

Example Doppelgänger spoofing of the Guardian website falsely stating the UK helped stage a false flag operation in Bucha, Ukraine. The website domain name is close to the actual guardian website to trick individuals into thinking they are viewing legitimate news stories from a well-known news organisation.

Source: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, The Doppelganger Case: Assessment of Platform Regulation on the EU Disinformation Environment, 20 May 2024.

18. Professor Martin Innes, Cardiff University described how the Social Design Agency conducts research on the West to tailor their approach through Doppelgänger:

> They are monitoring and scanning our media systems, and they are pulling economic trend reports and public opinion data. With that material they are trying to identify the pain points […] the issues where they think they can get traction. They will then design a campaign to do this. They have country plans.[25]

25 Q19 (Professor Martin Innes)

19. Data collected by the European Union's External Action Service (EEAS) estimates the Doppelgänger network consists of 228 domains and 25,000 coordinated inauthentic behaviour networks posting content in nine languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Turkish, Polish, Arabic, Hebrew, and Italian.[26]

20. To their credit, in December 2022, the social media platform Meta attributed the Doppelgänger operation to the Social Design Agency and Structura National Technologies, both in-receipt of funding from the Russian State.[27] This was later confirmed by France's VIGINUM agency.[28]

21. Professor Martin Innes' team at Cardiff University identified that the Doppelgänger network were amplifying disinformation regarding The Princess of Wales's health in the days before she announced her cancer diagnosis.[29] Operating within these claims were Doppelgänger network accounts who were posting replies on X about The Princess of Wales, sharing material denigrating Ukraine, celebrating President Putin's victory in recent elections and other points of interest to the Kremlin.[30]

22. During our visit to Berlin, we heard about an associated Russian operation by a group known as Storm 1516 which sought to influence Germany's elections in 2025 by creating more than 100 fake websites and targeting key political figures with false content.[31]

23. In February 2024, the then French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stéphane Séjourné, publicly revealed that the VIGINUM agency had discovered a pro-Russian disinformation network called 'Portal Kombat'. VIGINUM had identified similarities between the operating methods and content dissemination of the Portal Kombat network and that of the sanctioned Doppelgänger network.[32]

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26 EU External Action Service, 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the architecture of FIMI operations, 05 March 2025, p.26

27 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UK sanctions Putin's interference actors, 28 October 2024

28 The Guardian, French security experts identify Moscow-based disinformation network, 12 February 2024

29 BBC News, Kate rumours linked to Russian disinformation, 26 March 2024

30 Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute, Putin's 'Little grey men': Russia's political technologists and their methods, September 2024

31 VIGINUM, Analysis of the Russian information manipulation set Storm 1516, May 2025; VSquare, Hacking Democracy: Russia's Digital War on German and European Elections, 3 April 2025

32 French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Foreign digital interference – Result of investigations into the Russian propaganda network Portal Kombat, 15 February 2024

24. Subsequently in October 2024, three Russian agencies, the Social Design Agency, Structura National Technologies and ANO DIALOG, and three individuals[33] were sanctioned by the UK Government for their attempts to undermine and destabilise Ukraine and its democracy.[34] The EU and US have also placed linked Doppelgänger network individuals and organisations on their respective sanction's lists.[35]

25. **CONCLUSION**
Russia presents a clear and present threat to the UK, its overseas interests, and Euro-Atlantic security. The depth and intensity of hostile activity orchestrated by Russia across the West leaves us with no ambiguity. Russia's behaviour is that of a state at war against the West, and this will not change whilst Putin is in power. Therefore, it is vital that the Government ensures the UK and its allies harden their information ecosystems to make them an impenetrable and unattractive target of Russian interference.

26. **RECOMMENDATION**
The UK must prioritise existing funds for civil society organisations and independent media to enhance their resilience and capacity across Europe, but especially around the Black Sea Region and the Western Balkans, to stem the flow of Russian influence and aggression. It should also step-up its counter foreign information manipulation and interference offering to allies in the Black Sea Region to ensure Russia cannot succeed in its attempts to influence election results. Failure to do so risks the potential for breaches of human rights and limits democracy. This would further threaten direct confrontation with NATO and European security.

China

27. China is a multifaceted actor who is known to utilise a diverse toolkit including foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), economic coercion, transnational repression, and cyber-attacks to conduct

33 Ilya Andreevich Gambashidze, founder of Social Design Agency; Andrey Naumovich Perla, Social Design Agency Project Director; and Nikolay Aleksandrovich Tupikin, CEO of Social Design Agency and owner of Structura.

34 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029); Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UK sanctions Putin's interference actors, 28 October 2024

35 EU Council, Russian hybrid threats: EU agrees first listings in response to destabilising activities against the EU, its member states and partners, 16 December 2024; US Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Actors Supporting Kremlin-Directed Malign Influence Efforts, 20 March 2024

foreign interference. In comparison to Russia, the Chinese approach to FIMI is more institutionalised and heavily invested in information laundering official Chinese Communist Party narratives to achieve, as James Kynge Senior Research Fellow for China and the World at Chatham House explained, President Xi Jinping's "telling China's story well" mantra.[36] This approach seeks to emphasise Chinese successes, diminish negative content, and push Beijing friendly framing of issues of concern.[37]

Architecture and techniques

28. As outlined for Russia, China also employs a complex web of entities involved in FIMI activities. This includes the official state level (for example, government ministries, embassies and intelligence services) and state-controlled outlets, such as China Global Television Network (CGTN), China Daily and Xinhua News Agency. In addition, FIMI campaigns such as Spamouflage and Paperwall as well as election interference in the Philippines and Taiwan have all been linked to China.[38]

29. Of particular note is the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department which seeks to eliminate internal and external enemies, control of dissident groups and construct a coalition around the Chinese Communist Party to ensure its interests are served domestically and projected internationally.[39] Andrew Yeh, Executive Director, China Strategic Risks Institute explained that the United Front Work Department sought to control and influence the "40 million to 60 million overseas Chinese" through "neutralising any opposition there might be to Chinese Communist party rule."[40] The UK-China Transparency organisation stated that the United Front Work Department was seeking "to win influence and credence amongst the diaspora […] to instrumentalise them in support of the CCP's broader goals".[41]

36 Q74 (James Kynge); Q80 (Grace Theodoulou); Q82 (Andrew Yeh)
37 Dr William Matthews (Senior Research Fellow for China and the World at Chatham House); Ben Bland (Director, Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House) (DIS0010)
38 Correspondence from Minister Doughty following up on the oral evidence session on 06 January, 19 January 2026; EU External Action Service, 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the architecture of FIMI operations, 5 March 2025, p.16
39 Hong Kong Democracy Council (DIS0014)
40 Qq90–92 (Andrew Yeh)
41 UK-China Transparency (DIS0006)

30. The United Front concept is underpinned by China's 'Three Warfares' doctrine encompassing public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare with the aim to overcome the opposition without the need for kinetic warfare, creating an environment favourable to China.[42]

31. Dr William Matthews and Ben Bland of Chatham House argued that the UK Government must specify China under the enhanced tier of the National Security Act's Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.[43] This was also echoed by Andrew Yeh who additionally highlighted that China was increasingly using smaller and novel media forms, such as state-paid influencers on YouTube, to deliver their information operations. He was concerned to what degree this activity could be monitored and enforced under the enhanced tier of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.[44]

32. However, Grace Theodoulou, Council on Geostrategy was not convinced highlighting that businesses dealing with China could end up ensnared by significant bureaucracy, and instead suggested there was need for a "specific mechanism for China" rather than the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.[45]

Spamouflage

33. The Spamouflage network, sometimes referred to as Dragonbridge, is a long-running FIMI campaign linked to China, first reported by Graphika in 2019. Spamouflage utilises a network of obfuscated inauthentic social media accounts to continuously 'spam' content and amplify pro-Chinese messaging across social media platforms.[46]

34. In 2023, Rapid Response Mechanism Canada exposed a Spamouflage campaign targeting Canadian Parliamentarians and public figures critical of the Chinese Communist party in order to discredit them, infringe Canadians democratic rights and exacerbate polarisation.[47] The Minister of State for Europe, North America and UK Overseas Territories Stephen Doughty MP

42 Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019); Center for European Policy Analysis, Sino-Russian Convergence in Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference: A Global Threat to the US and Its Allies, 30 June 2025

43 Dr William Matthews (Senior Research Fellow for China and the World at Chatham House); Ben Bland (Director, Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House) (DIS0010)

44 Q106 (Andrew Yeh)

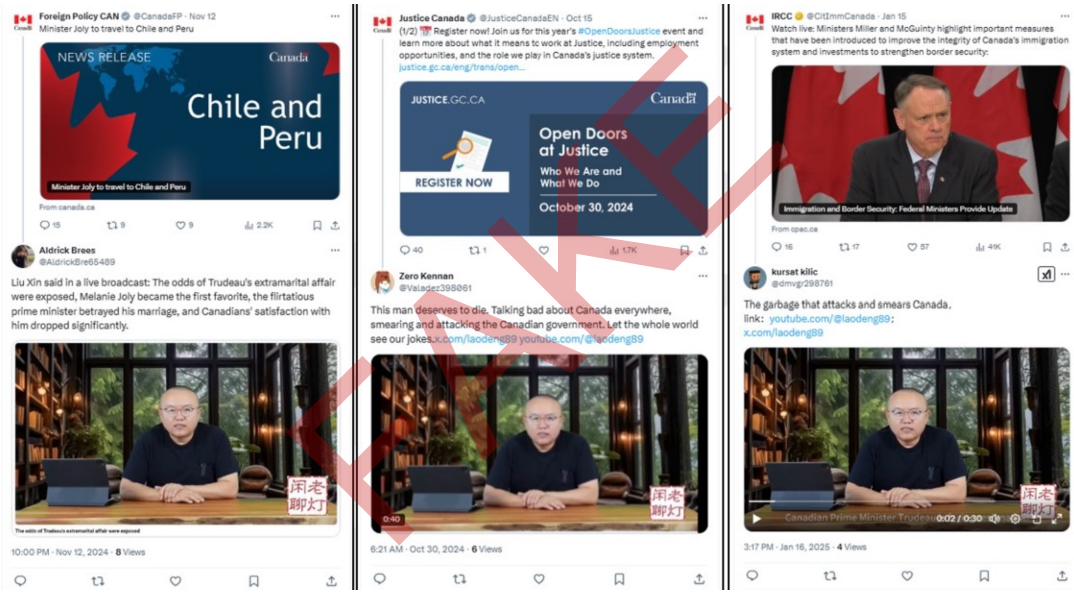
45 Q102 (Grace Theodoulou)

46 Government of Canada, Canada targeted in a new Chinese transnational repression campaign linked to 'Spamouflage', 31 January 2025

47 Government of Canada, Probable PRC "Spamouflage" campaign targets dozens of Canadian Members of Parliament in disinformation campaign, 23 October 2023

told the Committee that the campaign's ability to amplify disinformation "indicates the potential scale of FIMI campaigns and the complex coordination that can underpin these".[48]

35. Subsequently in August 2024, Rapid Response Mechanism Canada identified further activity by the Spamouflage network, generating up to 200 new posts daily targeting Canadian officials.[49] Nina Jankowicz, CEO, at the American Sunlight Project also explained that in September 2025 the Spamouflage network "deployed fake social media profiles posing as American voters to spread anti-US messaging and exacerbate domestic political divisions".[50]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Liu Xin said in a live broadcast: The odds of Trudeau's extramarital affair were exposed, Melanie Joly became the first favorite, the flirtatious prime minister betrayed his marriage, and Canadians' satisfaction with him dropped significantly.
10:00 PM · Nov 12, 2024 · 8 Views
Justice Canada @JusticeCanadaEN · Oct 15
(1/2) Register now! Join us for this year's #OpenDoorsJustice event and learn more about what it means to work at Justice, including employment opportunities, and the role we play in Canada's justice system.
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October 30, 2024
Zero Kennan
@Valadez398061
This man deserves to die. Talking bad about Canada everywhere, smearing and attacking the Canadian government. Let the whole world see our jokes.x.com/laodeng89 youtube.com/@laodeng89
6:21 AM · Oct 30, 2024 · 6 Views
IRCC @CitImmCanada · Jan 16
Watch live: Ministers Miller and McGuinty highlight important measures that have been introduced to improve the integrity of Canada's immigration system and investments to strengthen border security:
Immigration and Border Security: Federal Ministers Provide Update
From cpac.ca
kursat kilic
@dmvgr298761
The garbage that attacks and smears Canada.
link: youtube.com/@laodeng89:
x.com/laodeng89
Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau 0:02 / 0:30
3:17 PM · Jan 16, 2025 · 4 Views

Deepfake videos of an individual appeared in the replies sections of legitimate Government of Canada X accounts. The deepfaked individual, who had been critical of the Chinese Communist Party, was falsely presented claiming that the then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister Melanie Joly had an affair. Bot accounts also threatened the individual's well-being in attempt to discredit and harass as a form of transnational repression.

Source: Global Affairs Canada, Canada targeted in a new Chinese transnational repression campaign linked to 'Spamouflage', 31 January 2025.

48 Correspondence from Minister Doughty following up on oral evidence session on 06 January 2026, 19 January 2026

49 Government of Canada, Canada targeted in a new Chinese transnational repression campaign linked to 'Spamouflage', 31 January 2025

50 Nina Jankowicz (CEO at American Sunlight Project) (DIS0054)

The United States intervened in Hong Kong affairs, but the "beautiful scenery line" that the Secretary of State said was staged in the United States. The double standard of American democracy has remained unchanged. HongKongPolice 香港警察 香港 国安法 國安法
Lilly Anderson
As the Portland protests continue to escalate, Trump will end up in a bind of his own.
波特兰抗议示威持续升级，特朗普终将作茧自缚
Like Page
POLITICAL CONFLICT
CHAOS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Examples of Spamouflage content from June 2020, August 2020 and June 2024 targeting US audiences, promoting pro-Chinese narratives. The quality of content generation has improved overtime but still currently lacks significant engagement with users on social media platforms.

Source: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Pro-CCP Spamouflage campaign experiments with new tactics targeting the US, 1 April 2024.

36. **CONCLUSION**
The Government has committed to a three C's approach to bilateral relations with China: compete, cooperate and challenge. Whilst we of course recognise the need to engage with China, the second largest economy in the world, this cannot come at the cost of trading security for economic growth.

37. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government must treat China the same as it treats any other state. It is therefore vital that the Government is transparent with Parliament and the public and outlines their strategy for engagement and the red lines for countering Chinese state influence, including the use of cyber-attacks and disinformation.

Iran

38. Iran is also recognised as a prominent state actor conducting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).[51] Whilst Iranian information operations largely target the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia,[52] the UK has increasingly become a target due to its relationship

51 BBC World Service (DIS0046); BBC Media Action (DIS0047)
52 London Politica (DIS0034)

with the Middle East and London being the home of Iran International.[53] Iran views disinformation as a "cornerstone of its 'Forward Defence' strategy, aimed at keeping conflicts beyond its borders by exerting pressure on external fronts, and its overall strategic goal of exporting its revolution."[54]

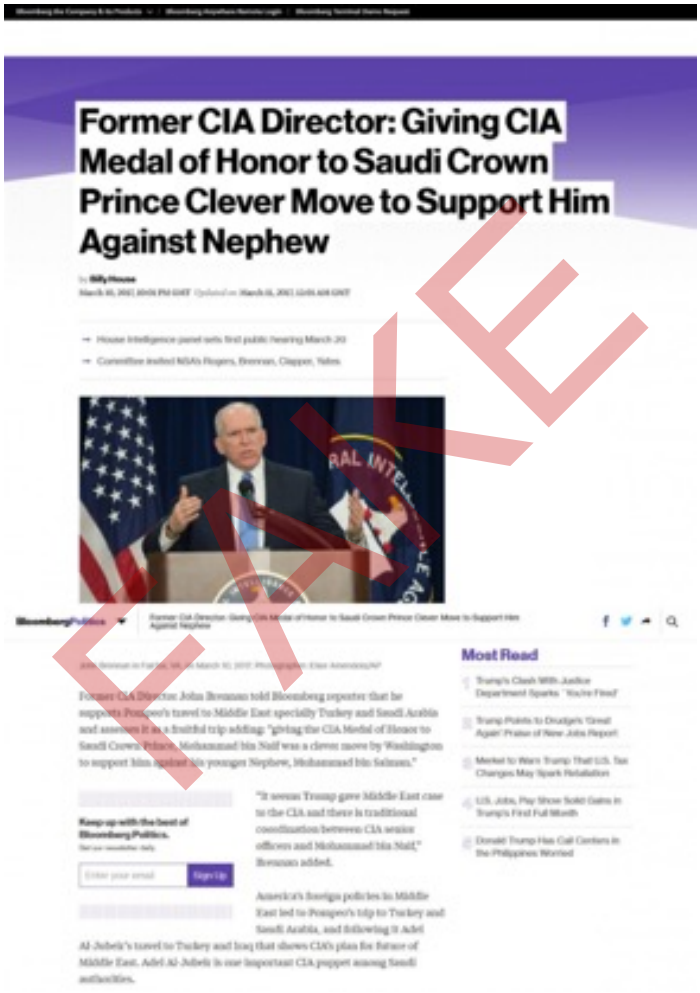
Architecture and techniques

39. Then Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei prioritised "disinformation, propaganda and psychological warfare operations (PSYOPs) against the regime's ideological enemies" and instructed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and state-owned media organisations to conduct FIMI both inside and outside of Iran.[55]

40. The Center for Countering Digital Hate explained that Iranian state-controlled Press TV organisation spreads disinformation on topics including "Holocaust denial, attacks on LGBT and women's rights, and hateful conspiracy theories involving Jewish people".[56] Although Iranian state-controlled media broadcast licences are revoked in the UK, they continue to spread their disinformation through their social media accounts.[57]

41. This was exemplified by the Iranian state linked 'Endless Mayfly' network, who utilised inauthentic social media accounts and impersonation of legitimate media organisation websites to disseminate disinformation targeting Saudi Arabia, Israel and the United States. The network used its inauthentic social media accounts to drive attention to its narratives and led to confusion and incorrect reporting.[58]

53 Antisemitism Policy Trust (DIS0004)
54 Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019)
55 United Against Nuclear Iran (DIS0042)
56 Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) (DIS0032); Antisemitism Policy Trust (DIS0004)
57 Antisemitism Policy Trust (DIS0004); Dr Tine Munk (Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Nottingham Trent University) (DIS0008)
58 London Politica (DIS0034)


Former CIA Director: Giving CIA Medal of Honor to Saudi Crown Prince Clever Move to Support Him Against Nephew
FAKE
Most Read

Example of a fake news article spoofing Bloomberg's website. The article falsely suggests that the former CIA Director was providing support for interfering in Saudi Arabia's domestic affairs as well as interfering in other Middle Eastern countries. The aim was to discredit both Saudi Arabia and the US, noting they were unreliable allies in the region.

Source: The Citizen Lab, Burned After Reading: Endless Mayfly's ephemeral disinformation campaign, 14 May 2019.

42. When asked about the FCDO's assessment of Iranian disinformation threats, Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories told the Committee that the Government was "very concerned about the threat that Iran poses both across the Middle East and beyond in seeking to exploit divisive issues" and that the Government was "incredibly clear-eyed about the threats posed, whether that is in the information space or physically".[59]

59 Q214 (Stephen Doughty MP)

43. When challenged on the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament's Iran Report findings that "nothing is actually being done to develop a future pipeline of Iran capability—despite the strong likelihood that the threat will increase in the coming years"[60] across Government, he noted he was "very confident in the advice and the expertise that we receive" from the Iran Unit within the FCDO.[61]

44. On 28 February, the US and Israel conducted joint strikes on Iran under the name Operation Epic Fury.[62] These strikes killed the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior Iranian military leaders. President Trump outlined that his strategic objective was weakening the Islamic Republic to enable a new, alternative regime and called on the Iranian people to "take over your government".[63] It is currently too early to speculate whether the joint US-Israeli military operation will lead to regime change in Iran, or like in Iraq and Libya, fragmentation.

45. **CONCLUSION**
Prior to the joint US and Israeli attack, the Iranian regime presented a clear and persistent threat to those opposing its world view. This has manifested in support for armed groups and terrorist organisations, and the transnational repression of critics. We support the Government's action in specifying Iran under the enhanced tier of the National Security Act 2023 Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.

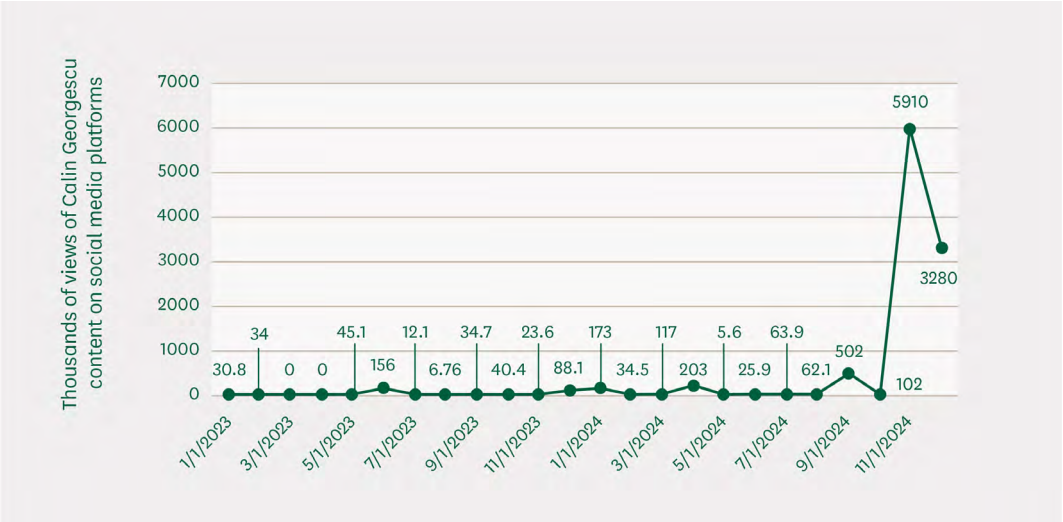
46. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Hybrid Threats Directorate should draw upon capabilities within the Department's Iranian regional teams to develop programming to counter foreign information manipulation interference campaigns emanating from Iran.

Non-state actors

47. Whilst considerable attention is paid to state actors, there is a growing recognition that non-state actors are increasing their capabilities to shape the information environment. Non-state actors such as private military companies seek to align their ideology with that of likeminded state actors to undermine the democratic process, whilst terrorist groups use manipulated information for recruitment and radicalisation.[64]

60 Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, Iran, HC1116, 10 July 2025, p.155
61 Q215 (Stephen Doughty MP)
62 US Central Command, U.S. Forces Launch Operation Epic Fury, 28 February 2026
63 BBC News, Six key lines from Trump's statement on Iran strikes, 28 February 2026
64 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

48. It should also be recognised that there is a growing trend of for-hire actors, including social media influencers. These individuals seemingly have little ideological basis for their actions and instead take payments from state or other non-state actors to disseminate disinformation to their extensive follower networks.[65] The Committee heard examples of how for-hire social media actors were used to interfere in the 2024/25 Romanian Presidential election during its visit to Bucharest.



Timeseries analysis of the deliberate, coordinated amplification of Calin Georgescu content on multiple social media platform. Note the spike in viewership during the November 2024 Presidential election period.

Source: Foreign Policy Centre, Networks of Influence: Decoding foreign meddling in Romania's elections: A collaborative investigation into disinformation campaigns and influence operation, December 2024.

Wagner Group and Africa Corps

49. The private military company the Wagner Group was founded and led by Yevgeny Prigozhin. Following Prigozhin's attempted coup in June 2023, and his subsequent death in August 2023, the Russian state dismantled Wagner's structures. Presently the Russian military intelligence service (GRU), foreign intelligence service (SVR) and Federal Security Service (FSB) have taken a more direct role in the operations and management of the Wagner Group.[66] Due to this restructuring a new umbrella organisation,

65 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029); Q171 (Nishant Lalwani)

66 The FSB is the main domestic security agency and is a successor to the Communist-era KGB. It is responsible for counter-terrorism and counter espionage and Russian information security. The SVR is the foreign intelligence service and was also formed from the remains of the KGB. The GRU is the military intelligence agency, and its official remit is to provide military intelligence to the Russian president and government, to ensure Russia's military, economic and technological security.

Africa Corps, has emerged under the direction of the Russian Ministry of Defence and the Russian military intelligence service (GRU). This group has subsumed many of the information operations being conducted across Africa by the Wagner Group.[67] Dr Antonio Giustozzi, Royal United Services Institute highlighted that Russian proxies operating from St Petersburg were being "funded at the rate of around $10 million a month" for their global information warfare campaigns.[68]

50. Africa Corps FIMI capabilities are largely a continuation of that conducted by the Wagner Group however, they are closely linked to a new Russian-state affiliated media agency formed in late 2023, called Africa Initiative.[69]

51. Africa Initiative states its aim is to be "the bridge of information between Russia and Africa."[70] Africa Initiative publishes manipulated news articles in Russian, English, French, Spanish and Arabic as well as distributing content across social media platforms including six Telegram channels, a Facebook page and a Spanish language TikTok account.[71]

52. The Africa Initiative operates both digitally and physically. On the ground, it creates associations to mobilise local influencers, journalists, and activists to propagate Russian disinformation among African populations. One of the most notable examples is the creation of an affiliated association in Burkina Faso, which has become a central hub for Russian influence on the continent.[72] The content it produces includes promoting the actions of Africa Corps, anti-medical, anti-western and anti-NATO narratives, promotion of the Russian Federation, and health and biological weapons disinformation.[73]

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67 Q120 (Dr Antonio Giustozzi); The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Africa Corps- a new iteration of Russia's old military presence in Africa, May 2024; Critical Threats, Wagner Out, Africa Corps In: Africa File, 12 June 2025

68 Q129 (Dr Antonio Giustozzi)

69 Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019)

70 Nordsint (DIS0048); Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019); VIGINUM, Africa Initiative: From public diplomacy to cover influence operations, June 2025, p.5

71 VIGINUM, Africa Initiative: From public diplomacy to cover influence operations, June 2025, p.5

72 VIGINUM, Africa Initiative: From public diplomacy to cover influence operations, June 2025

73 Nordsint (DIS0048); Q123 (Dr Antonio Giustozzi); OpenAI, Influence and cyber operations: an update, October 2024

L'AFRIQUE SE DÉTOURNE DE LA FRANCE
Macron s'explique sur l'échec en Afrique
ENQUÊTE CHOC
MALI RÉVÈLE TOUT
1:56
Liens entre l'Ukraine et le Sahel: L'enquête malienne dévoilée
FAKE

Examples of disinformation videos posted on Africa Corps. affiliated YouTube channels exposing viewers to pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western narratives.

Source: VIGINUM, Africa Initiative: From public diplomacy to cover influence operations, June 2025.

53. The US State Department in 2024 announced that "Russian intelligence services provide material support and guidelines" to Africa Initiative, "which spreads disinformation regarding the United States and European countries."[74]

54. In December 2024, the EU sanctioned Africa Initiative and Artyom Kureyev (Editor-in-Chief)[75] for their involvement in "malign activities, namely coordinated disinformation campaigns, both in Europe and Africa".[76] On 18 July 2025, the UK sanctioned Africa Initiative and three of its leaders.[77] The FCDO noted that Africa Initiative had attempted to "undermine lifesaving global health initiatives in the region by pushing baseless conspiracy theories to further the Kremlin's political agenda."[78]

74 US Department of State, The Kremlin's Efforts to Spread Deadly Disinformation in Africa, 12 February 2024

75 Artyom Kureyev has allegedly been linked to the FSB Fifth Service Department for Operational Information and International Relations. See The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Africa Corps- a new iteration of Russia's old military presence in Africa, May 2024, p.7

76 European Union, Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/3188 of 16 December 2024 implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/2642 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's destabilizing activities, 16 December 2024

77 Artyom Kureyev, Editor-in-Chief; Victor Lukovenko, Founder of Africa Initiative in Burkina Faso; and Anna Zamaravea, Deputy Editor-in-Chief.

78 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UK sanctions Russian spies at the heart of Putin's malicious regime, 18 July 2025

55. **CONCLUSION**
We welcome the Government's actions to sanction the Russian information agency Africa Initiative and three of its leaders in July 2025, mirroring those implemented by the European Union in December 2024.

Daesh

56. The UK is a key member of the Global Coalition against Daesh.[79] The Global Coalition was formed in 2014, with the key focus on degrading Daesh capabilities and ensuring its enduring defeat, including military campaigns in Iraq and Syria, weakening Daesh's financing and economic infrastructure, preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders, supporting stabilisation and the restoration of essential public services to areas liberated from Daesh, and countering the group's propaganda.[80] The UK leads the Global Coalition's Communications Working Group, the Counter Daesh Communications Cell, to counter Daesh's terrorist propaganda directly and build the resilience of vulnerable audiences to Daesh and violent extremism.[81]

Daesh propaganda video posted on Facebook, viewed more than 24,000 times. Shows high user engagement on social media platforms avoiding moderation.

Source: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Coordinating Through Chaos: The State of the Islamic State Online in 2026, 26 February 2026.

79 The terrorist group Daesh is also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State (IS) and Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)
80 Global Coalition against Daesh, Our Mission, accessed 3 September 2025
81 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

57. However, there has been criticism of the Counter Daesh Communications Cell's efficacy. Dr Antonio Giustozzi explained that there was a lack of a "good alternative narrative" and that he thought the Cell had not been very effective as its approach was "very weak on messages that can be appealing to the kind of public that Daesh targets."[82]

58. **CONCLUSION**
We are concerned that the Global Coalition against Daesh's Counter Daesh Communications Cell, led by the UK, is not delivering as intended. Given the resurgence of Daesh in North Africa and the Middle East, it is imperative that tools to counter Daesh are effective.

59. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should review its work through the Counter Daesh Communications Cell to ensure it is producing messaging that appeals to potential recruits. It should also increase efforts to identify credible partners on the ground who are best placed to deliver counter-Daesh narratives.

82 Q134 (Dr Antonio Giustozzi)

3 The scale of foreign information manipulation and interference

60. Understanding the scale of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is critical to assess its impact on global security. The breadth of targets globally underscores the vulnerability of democracies and the need to increase resilience. This should not be seen as a comprehensive analysis, rather illustrative examples of the threats faced worldwide.

Europe

61. Russia is frequently cited as the major FIMI threat to Europe, and it is investing significant resources into operations to leverage influence in the Black Sea region (Georgia, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine), the southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and the Nordic-Baltic eight (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden).

62. As part of its neo-imperialist ambitions under President Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin routinely employs FIMI alongside its hybrid warfare techniques including support for pro-Russian political parties, sabotage, illicit financing, election interference, and cyber-attacks. These tools seek to influence the populations using historical narratives of Soviet rule, while fostering public disillusionment with domestic governments' failures to address corruption and improve living standards.

The Black Sea Region

63. The Black Sea Region is of strategic importance to Russia due to its role in the movement of people and commodities, especially Russian oil. Russia has sought to influence the former Soviet States encircling the Black Sea region through hybrid attacks for which FIMI is an integral element.

Ukraine

64. Since the Euromaidan revolution[83] in 2013, Ukraine has been the principal target of Russian information warfare, evolving from narratives centred on Russophobia and Nazism towards discrediting Ukrainian political leadership and military actions to demoralise the population.[84] Professor Martin Innes, Cardiff University explained that there are around "12 separate Russian information influence operations continually at work trying to influence public perceptions and understanding of the conflict in Ukraine."[85]

65. Olena Zelenska, Ukraine's First Lady, has been a repeated target of Russian aligned disinformation campaigns. One prominent false claim alleged that she purchased a rare Bugatti Tourbillon sports car worth £3.8 million during a visit to Paris for the D-Day commemorations in June 2024, supposedly using American military aid funds. The fabricated story spread rapidly on X, where it was viewed more than 12 million times.[86]

83 Sometimes referred to as the Revolution of Dignity.

84 Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019); Henry Jackson Society (DIS0021); Dr Stephen Hutchings (Professor of Russian Studies at University of Manchester); Dr Vera Tolz (Professor of Russian Studies at University of Manchester); Dr Alexandr Voronovici (Postdoctoral Research Associate at University of Manchester) (DIS0022)

85 Q4 (Professor Martin Innes)

86 BBC News, A Bugatti car, a first lady and the fake stories aimed at Americans, 3 July 2024

Falsified invoice posted online with numerous spelling mistakes, punctuation and incorrect use of English suggesting that the Ukrainian First Lady had bought a Bugatti car.

Source: BBC News, A Bugatti car, a first lady and the fake stories aimed at Americans, 3 July 2024.

66. Around the fourth anniversary of Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) claimed that the UK and France were preparing to covertly supply nuclear weapons to Ukraine. This baseless allegation was rapidly amplified by Russian state media, President Putin, and established Russian linked disinformation networks. In just 48 hours, roughly 2,700 articles repeating the claim appeared across multiple languages. The narrative targeted the UK and France specifically because of their prominent roles in the "Coalition of the Willing," aiming to erode Western military support for Ukraine by fuelling fears of a renewed Cold War style nuclear confrontation.[87]

67. Pro-Russian media outlets and social media accounts have repeatedly claimed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has purchased Nazi related artefacts and properties, including Hitler's tearoom, the "Eagle's Nest" in Bavaria. These allegations form part of wider Russian disinformation efforts aimed at portraying Ukraine as Nazi aligned, in order to justify the invasion and undermine the President.[88]

87 SPRAVDI, Inside Russia's Newest Disinformation Campaign To Convince The World That Ukraine Is Nuclear Threat, 26 February 2026

88 EUvsDisinfo, DISINFO: Zelensky bought Hitler's villa, 11 February 2025

68. Ukrainian MP Iryna Herashchenko serving on the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine described how Russia is using disinformation as a central pillar of its hybrid warfare strategy to undermine democratic institutions, sow division and erode public trust within Ukraine and across the West:

> Ukraine has a unique experience of resisting Russian disinformation. As early as 2014, our team began blocking Russian TV channels and social media platforms, not because they were media, but because they were tools of the Kremlin propaganda machine […] Today, Russia continues to interfere in elections and manipulate public opinion across the globe. It is part of its hybrid war.[89]

69. Although concerns have been raised that Russia and China are coordinating information operations regarding Ukraine, Grace Theodoulou, Council on Geostrategy, suggested this cooperation was currently "quite opportunistic and on specific common interests" but that a recent agreement between a Russian media conglomerate and Chinese Xinhua News could see "stronger, more systemic co-operation between China and Russia."[90]

70. Oleksandr Merezhko MP, Chair of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation urged the UK to continue pressurising Russian-backed disinformation networks and continue funding independent media organisations like the BBC as:

> The best weapon in our struggle against Russian propaganda and disinformation is truth. That is why I am so grateful to the UK and the BBC, to CNN and to other information outlets that are telling the truth about what is going on in Ukraine.[91]

71. The One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement between the UK and Ukraine was signed in Kyiv by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on 16 January 2025. The Agreement contains 14 articles for collaboration including Article 7, combatting FIMI.[92] Accompanying the Agreement is a non-binding Partnership Declaration, again signed by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, composed of 11 pillars which provides further information on the types of actions and activities that the two countries may take to fulfil the One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement. Pillar 7 refers to actions to counter FIMI including

89 Oral evidence taken on 20 May 2025, Q9 (Iryna Herashchenko MP)
90 Q86 (Grace Theodoulou)
91 Oral evidence taken on 20 May 2025, Q13 (Oleksandr Merezhko MP)
92 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom and Ukraine, 16 January 2025

supporting Ukraine's strategic communication institutes, implementing joint media initiatives to strengthen independent media and civil society and enhancing collaboration to enable effective disruption of FIMI.[93]

72. Oleksandr Merezhko MP expressed the importance of the One Hundred Year Partnership as a signal to "Putin and to Russia that we [Ukraine] are not alone—that there is solidarity after all, and that we have a very important, reliable and powerful friend in the UK".[94]

73. However, there has been minimal information from the Government regarding implementation of the Agreement. When asked for further clarity, Jonny Hall CMG OBE, Director of the FCDO's Hybrid Threats Directorate explained the UK:

> […] work with the Ukrainians across all the strands that we see as necessary to combat the type of information warfare that they are facing in an extremely acute way, but which we are also seeing across the entire continent. […] through the partnership what we really hope to do is deepen that and continue to draw on the incredible work that the Ukrainians have done to inform how we build our capabilities as much as the other way around.[95]

74. **CONCLUSION**
For over four years, Ukraine has continued to resist an imperialist Russia determined to erase its sovereignty and destabilise European security. We commend the bravery and sacrifice of the Ukrainian people as they fight not only for their own freedom but for the security of Europe. We also applaud the substantial support the UK Government continues to provide in aiding Ukraine to counter Russian information warfare.

75. **CONCLUSION**
For over a decade, Ukrainians have been resisting Russian information warfare and developing an arsenal of lessons learnt and best practices. It is therefore essential that Article 7 of the UK-Ukraine One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement is seen as a two-way street, so that the UK can both support Ukraine and learn essential lessons. We are additionally concerned that there have been limited details to date on the roadmap for how and when activities will be undertaken or whether this Agreement will be amended in the event of a peace agreement with Russia.

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93 Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, UK-Ukraine 100 Year Partnership Declaration, 17 January 2025

94 Oral evidence taken on 20 May 2025, Q4 (Oleksandr Merezhko MP)

95 Q203 (Jonny Hall)

76. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should provide greater clarity on the progress made in implementing the One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement between the UK and Ukraine, including specific information on the operation and intent of Article 7, combatting foreign information manipulation and interference. It should also set out what discussions, if any, have taken place with Ukraine regarding potential amendments to the Agreement in the event that a peace settlement with Russia is reached.

Georgia

77. Georgia continues to be a frontline country in the competition for influence in the Black Sea Region between Russia and the West. The UK and the EU have been supporting Georgian people's desire to move towards a Western-style liberal democracy, with the potential of both NATO and EU membership. Whereas Russia firmly wants to prevent NATO membership from a neighbouring country and provides support to the occupied enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[96] Russia's desire to disrupt Georgia's integration into the West underlay the tensions leading to the Russo-Georgia war which erupted on 7 August 2008 and the disputed 2024 election.[97]

78. On 26 October 2024, Georgia went to the polls. The official election results gave the ruling Georgian Dream party a 54% majority win, whilst the exit polls suggested the opposition had a 10% margin over the Georgian Dream Party.[98] Salome Zourabichvili, fifth President of Georgia and the opposition parties refused to recognise the result, with the elected Parliamentarians refusing to take their seats in Parliament. The disputed results triggered widespread protests against the Georgian Dream Government.[99] Salome Zourabichvili explained to the Committee that the election was the target of foreign and domestic information manipulation and electoral interference:

> During these elections there was very clearly, in everybody's eyes, including all the observation missions that were here—as time goes by, we discover new details that just confirm this—a large and sophisticated manipulation operation, which was clearly inspired and supported by Russians and Russian methods.[100]

96 Voice of America, Georgia's Zourabichvili says US shouldn't back government that is result of 'rigged elections', 22 January 2025
97 Radio Free Europe, August 7 Or 8? Why The Date Georgia Marks Its 2008 War With Russia Is So Controversial, 7 August 2023
98 Edison Research, Edison Research Exit Poll projects clear victory for opposition parties in Republic of Georgia Parliamentary Elections, 26 October 2024
99 Qq43–44 (Salome Zourabichvili)
100 Q43 (Salome Zourabichvili)

79. Georgian Dream, has consolidated power since it won its first election in 2012, sidelining opposition voices, suspended EU accession talks, awarded strategic infrastructure projects to Chinese firms and repeated pro-Russian anti-western narratives.[101] Salome Zourabichvili expanded that the Georgian Dream Government has sought to suppress civil society and non-governmental organisations, independent media, and legitimate protest by "implementing not only the laws and methods of Russia or Belarus but their rhetoric and their propaganda".[102] This includes the Foreign Agents Registration Act requiring non-governmental organisations and independent media that receive more than 20% of their funding from foreign donors to register as an organisation bearing the interests of a foreign state.[103]

80. The founder of the Georgian Dream Party is Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire who made his fortune in 1990s post-Soviet Russia, founding banking, metals and telecoms companies, before returning to Georgia in 2003.[104] Bidzina Ivanishvili became Georgian Prime Minister in 2012, serving for one year before stepping away from frontline politics. Bidzina Ivanishvili has repeated Russian anti-Western narratives including that the West is seeking to use Georgia to open a "second front" in the Ukraine conflict through the "Global War Party".[105] Bidzina Ivanishvili was sanctioned by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control on 27 December 2024 for his role in "undermining the democratic and Euro-Atlantic future of Georgia for the benefit of the Russian Federation".[106] The European Parliament adopted a resolution on 13 February 2025 urging EU member states to freeze assets and personally sanction Bidzina Ivanishvili, his family, high-ranking officials of the Georgian Dream, the enablers in the business and state structures, and propagandists.[107]

81. The Committee sought clarification from Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and UK Overseas Territories, regarding what assistance the UK Government was providing to support Georgian civil society organisations, combat disinformation and potential to implement sanctions on Georgian Dream Party officials, in line with allies like the

101 Q43 (Salome Zourabichvili)
102 Q50 (Salome Zourabichvili)
103 BBC News, Georgia approves controversial 'foreign agent' law, sparking more protests, 14 May 2024
104 BBC News, Local hero or Russian ally? The billionaire dividing Georgians, 18 March 2025; The Guardian, Who is Bidzina Ivanishvili, the shadowy billionaire behind Georgia's pivot to Russia?, 27 October 2024
105 Q49 (Salome Zourabichvili)
106 US Embassy in Georgia, Sanctioning Georgian Dream Founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, 27 December 2024
107 European Parliament, Resolution on the further deterioration of the political situation in Georgia, 13 February 2025

US and EU.[108] In response, the Minster highlighted that "UK support for civil society and independent media has long been a core pillar of our partnership with Georgia", and was providing funding for "programme work to support independent media and non-profit organisations that promote access to unbiased information."[109] However, Salome Zourabichvili rejected that the West had helped combat Russian interference, "we have received no support. There was no clear strategy to counter the Russian strategy."[110]

82. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights recently released its report under the Moscow Mechanism on developments in Georgia concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms. The report concludes that "marked democratic backsliding has taken place in Georgia" since spring 2024. It found that the Georgian Dream Government have "gradually limited" freedoms of speech, expression and assembly through the introduction of "legislation targeting civil society, political opposition, independent media and the LGBT+ community." The report sets out 46 recommendations for the Georgian authorities to address "outstanding challenges," including conducting an independent and impartial investigation into alleged irregularities during the 2024 parliamentary elections.[111]

83. **CONCLUSION**

The Committee is deeply concerned about the continued deterioration of democracy in Georgia which, on its current trajectory, will lead to an entrenched autocracy firmly under Russia's sphere of influence, like Belarus. We condemn the actions of the Georgian Dream Government in suspending EU accession talks, repressing opposition voices, limiting legitimate protest, and spreading disinformation. These actions imitate the Russian playbook and indicate coordination between Tbilisi and Moscow. We support the actions already taken by the UK Government in sanctioning Georgian officials responsible for enabling human rights violations in response to legitimate protests.

108 Correspondence with Minister for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories relating to Georgia, 7 April 2025

109 Correspondence from the Minister for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories relating to Georgia, 24 April 2025

110 Q62 (Salome Zourabichvili)

111 OSCE, Report on Developments in Georgia in Respect of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms since Spring 2024, 12 March 2026

84. **RECOMMENDATION**
We call on the Government to implement new targeted financial and travel sanctions on Georgian Dream officials supporting the Foreign Agents Registration Act, Georgian kleptocrats and Georgian media organisation spreading disinformation. These additional designations would significantly increase the cost on those who are seeking to undermine the Georgian people's desire for a European alignment and signify the UK's support for Georgian democracy, not autocracy.

Moldova

85. Moldova continues to be a direct target of Russian hybrid warfare including cyberattacks, illicit financing schemes, prolific information manipulation campaigns, and political rhetoric espoused by Kremlin-linked actors, all targeting Moldova's democratic institutions and processes.[112] This was exemplified by Russian attempts to interfere in Moldova's 2024 Presidential election and EU Referendum and 2025 Parliamentary election. Ana Revenco, Director, Moldovan Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation discussed the methods used by Russia to interfere in Moldova's democracy:

> […] deepfakes and cheapfakes, AI-generated content, AI-promoted content, networks of thousands of inauthentic accounts constantly engaged in promoting lies and fakes, […] fake official memorandums, letters or Government protocols being circulated, and sites impersonating the websites of state institutions and of the leadership, […] pseudo-opinion polls that have been organised online, which were nothing more than an attempt to inculcate hostile narratives among the consumers.[113]

86. Ana Revenco further explained how social media platforms were utilised by Russia for information laundering and amplification through inauthentic accounts. She noted that these narratives often used fear to "trigger an emotional reaction to the messages, blocking critical thinking".[114]

112 Henry Jackson Society (DIS0021); Q248 (Ana Revenco)
113 Q248 (Ana Revenco)
114 Q249 (Ana Revenco)

Social media accounts spreading pro-Russian and anti-European narratives targeting the Moldovan population ahead of their 2024 elections.

Source: Radio Free Europe, As Moldova Votes, Widespread Poverty Feeds Anti-Western Narratives, 24 September 2024.

87. Russian state aligned media repeatedly promotes the narrative that Western countries are attempting to encircle Russia and intend to turn Moldova into "a second Ukraine." These outlets claim that the West provoked Russia's unlawful full-scale invasion of Ukraine and that Moldova, portrayed as a Western puppet, is preparing to stage false-flag attacks in Transnistria.[115]

88. The Moldovan police have accused the Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor of working with the sanctioned Russian state-owned Promsvyazbank[116] to orchestrate an industrial scale vote buying operation during the 2025 election. It is claimed that Ilan Shor used the A7A5 stablecoin, pegged to the Russian rouble, to transfer at least $39 million to Moldovan citizens in exchange for their votes.[117] The UK and allies provided expert support to Moldova to "prevent at least certain transactions and diminish the impact" of this illicit financing campaign.[118]

115 See for example: EUvsDisinfo, DISINFO: The West is considering of making Moldova "the second Ukraine", accessed 10 March 2026

116 Promsvyazbank services Russia's military industrial complex and was sanctioned by the UK in May 2025. See Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, Financial Sanctions Notice: Russia, 20 May 2025

117 Centre for Information Resilience, A7A5: Circumventing sanctions with stablecoin cryptocurrency, 25 June 2025

118 Q255 (Ana Revenco)

89. Many highlighted Moldova's approach to combatting FIMI as framework that should be implemented by other Western governments. Ana Revenco explained Moldova's two step approach was to first publicly identify FIMI campaigns and share the information with the public. This exposure included President Maia Sandu making an unprecedented national address ahead of the Parliamentary elections, to expose Russia's widespread interference.[119] This was accompanied with exposures of Russian interference by the UK and allies.[120]

90. Secondly, the Moldovan government "created strong partnership with civil society organisations, think-tanks, investigative journalists and fact-checkers", establishing information sharing "to ensure that this topic is constantly kept on the public agenda so that people are constantly aware of the importance of staying attentive in the information space".[121] Ana Revenco also explained that Moldova sought to share information with social media platforms but expressed frustration with their engagement noting it was "far from sufficient".[122]

91. During our visit to Moldova, we consistently heard praise from government officials, civil society representatives, and independent journalists for the UK Government's support in helping to ensure free and fair elections.

92. **CONCLUSION**

Moldova, like Georgia, has faced concerted Russian interference in its politics, most visibly during the 2024 Presidential election and EU referendum and 2025 Parliamentary election. Yet on each occasion the Moldovan people have decisively rejected a turn toward Russia, choosing instead a European future. Moldova's resilience in the face of persistent Russian disinformation, electoral interference, illicit financing, and political subversion should serve as a lesson for the UK. The Committee saw firsthand the essential support the UK Government is providing to help Moldova counter these threats. We commend the work of the British Embassy in Chișinău and welcome the UK Government's continued commitment to ensuring that Moldova can safeguard its independence and pursue its chosen European path.

119 Q252 (Ana Revenco)
120 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)
121 Q252 (Ana Revenco)
122 Q252 (Ana Revenco)

93. **RECOMMENDATION**
The UK Government must support Moldova in its investigations into those actors which sought to undermine electoral integrity through cyber-attacks, fake bomb threats at polling stations and foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns. This includes the UK sanctioning individuals and organisations responsible. The UK must make clear that there are consequences for those who sought to deliberately interfere in Moldova's democracy.

The Western Balkans and Armenia

94. Russia is seeking to extend its influence in the Western Balkans through FIMI narratives seeking to exploit historical, cultural, and religious ties, especially with Serb populations in Serbia, Republika Srpska, and Montenegro.[123] Russian narratives aim to undermine NATO and European influence in the region.[124] The Henry Jackson Society highlighted that Russia continues to have a significant presence in Serbia through RT and Sputnik disseminating false narratives and amplifying existing tensions to deter Serbia's European pathway.[125]

95. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, pro-Kremlin media outlets on social media platforms and websites back Republika Srpska's secessionism claims as well as efforts to reinforce post-war ethnic divisions, support for Russian aggression in Ukraine and campaigns against the UN Srebrenica Resolution on Commemorating 11 July as the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide.[126] These are all attempts to exploit tensions between the Federation of Bosnian Muslims and Croats and the Serb-dominated Republika Srpksa.

96. One such example of a Western Balkans targeted Russian FIMI operation is the Russian state linked Rybar Project. The Rybar Project has been operating a multi-platform and multi-media covert foreign information manipulation and interference network promoting pro-Russian narratives and support for the illegal invasion of Ukraine. This includes the operation of 250 Telegram channels in 28 languages, disseminating comics and graphic novels in multiple languages and the establishment of media training

123 Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Monitoring Influence & Disinformation Campaigns in the Western Balkans, 18 December 2024; Council of Europe, Protecting journalists and fighting disinformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11 June 2024

124 SEE Check, Disinformation Report: Montenegro in 2024, 9 June 2025

125 Henry Jackson Society (DIS0021)

126 Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Monitoring Influence & Disinformation Campaigns in the Western Balkans, 18 December 2024

schools across the Western Balkans.[127] The UK Government sanctioned Rybar LLC and its co-owner and General Director Mikhail Sergeevich Zvinchuk on 9 December 2026.[128]

Example of war-themed comic books being used by Russian-linked Rybar project to promote pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian narratives to a younger audience. This example shows a Polish General shouting at Ukrainian soldiers portraying the false narrative that Ukrainian soldiers lack the motivation to fight and are pawns of Western NATO generals.

Source: BBC News, How the Kremlin uses comics to glorify its war in Ukraine, 30 May 2024.

97. Montenegro continues to be subjected to FIMI, particularly from Serbia and Russia, due to its shared Slavic heritage and close ties to the Orthodox Church. Disinformation campaigns have promoted pro-Russian, anti-European and anti-NATO narratives, aiming to normalise support for the Kremlin and obstruct Montenegro's integration with Western institutions. Such campaigns have also targeted Montenegro's tourism

127 Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019)

128 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, New UK action against foreign information warfare, 9 December 2026

sector. During its visit, the Committee was presented with cases of disinformation alleging widespread E. coli contamination in hotels, as well as the presence of sharks and snakes in the country's coastal waters.[129]

98. One issue repeatedly raised in our visits across Europe was the threat of Russian interference in Armenia as it increasingly moves out of Russia's shadow towards Europe. With Parliamentary elections taking place in June, the Head of the Armenian Security Council, Armen Grigoryan, has warned that the biggest risk Armenia faces in 2026 is a hybrid threat from third countries.[130] It is highly likely that Russia will use the lessons it has learnt across the Eastern Neighbourhood to interfere in Armenia's electoral process to secure a pro-Russian victory.

99. **CONCLUSION**
The Western Balkans and Armenia face a range of foreign information and manipulation challenges seeking to distort public opinion, promote authoritarian alternatives, and destabilise its democracies. Stability in the Western Balkans is vital for European security and NATO cohesion, while Armenia deserves support for its efforts to move closer to Europe and the West.

100. **RECOMMENDATION**
Working with the European Union, the UK Government should scale-up assistance for independent media, civil society organisations and media literacy whilst continuing to monitor and expose foreign influence operations in these regions.

Africa

101. Africa's information environment is increasingly becoming contested, with state and non-state actors seeking to leverage historical colonial exploitation and racial injustices within their messaging to foster anti-Western sentiment.[131] Dr Dani Madrid-Morales, University of Sheffield outlined the main state actors operating across Africa. He explained that in North Africa, Russia, Qatar and the Emirates were dominant,[132] whilst in western Africa "Russia, to some extent China, and obviously Turkey is a key

129 See for example: DFRLab, Montenegro's information environment through history, 17 February 2020 and Digital Forensic Center, Infrastructure of Russian Influence in the Western Balkans, 2 December 2025

130 Carnegie Politika, Russia won't give up its influence in Armenia without a fight, 3 February 2026

131 Dr Dani Madrid-Morales (Lecturer at University of Sheffield) (DIS0035); Logically (DIS0028); Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

132 Q117 (Dr Dani Madrid-Morales)

actor that has entered the space in recent years".[133] In eastern Africa, China is a significant actor, whereas malign actors "are really struggling to make inroads" in southern Africa due to South Africa's strong media presence.[134]

102. Dr Antonio Giustozzi, Royal United Services Institute described the role of the Russian affiliated Wagner Group and Africa Corps in disseminating FIMI. He highlighted that these private military companies had identified "there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the French" in western Africa and using disinformation they were able to attract "media houses, individual journalists and, very importantly, politicians" and provide them with the capabilities to "rise to the top of this information war" and undermine support for the West.[135]

133 Q113 (Dr Dani Madrid-Morales)
134 Q117 (Dr Dani Madrid-Morales)
135 Q123 (Dr Antonio Giustozzi)

Russian-affiliated disinformation networks promoting anti-NATO and anti-French narratives.

Source: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Russian information operations outside of the Western information environment (Revised version), 28 January 2025.

103. This is exemplified in Mali, where anti-French and anti-UN disinformation was driven by the Wagner Group and Africa Corps. Through exploiting historical divisions and sowing deep distrust of Western partners, the UN peacekeeping mission became the most dangerous active peacekeeping mission in the world and was forced to close in 2023 ceding control to Russian private military companies and Mali's military junta.[136]

104. China has also been seeking to expand its influence in Africa, through partnerships agreements with local media organisations and journalistic training.[137] Andrew Yeh, Executive Director at China Strategic Risks Institute noted that these agreements require the African media organisation "every once in a while, to broadcast a story from the Chinese media", to promote pro-Chinese messaging.[138] Dr Dani Madrid-Morales used the example of

136 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029); Q123 (Dr Antonio Giustozzi); Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Disinformation is being weaponised against all of us: UK Statement at the UN Fourth Committee, 6 November 2024

137 Q126 (Dr Dani Madrid-Morales)

138 Q83 (Andrew Yeh)

Lesotho and Kenya to underscore how Chinese investment in the media ecosystem has allowed them to disseminate its core messaging at the expense of western media:

> If you go to a small country like Lesotho, for four hours a day the national broadcaster switches off and broadcasts CGTN. Those four hours used to be for the BBC—that used to be the choice for those four hours. In Kenya, on national TV at 9 pm—prime time for meals—they switch on to CGTN. That is a slot that used to be for CNN. No other country has the infrastructure that China has, and we are not doing enough to counter those spaces. We have retreated from the African market, and other actors have entered.[139]

105. Dr Dani Madrid-Morales criticised the lack of coordination between Western allies and multilateral organisations in Africa who were often too "narrowly focused on countering false narratives rather than tackling the underlying vulnerabilities that allow FIMI to flourish".[140] He advocated for greater support for locally driven initiatives that "reinforce media pluralism, transparency, and accountability" and sustained funding of the BBC World Service.[141]

106. **CONCLUSION**
The West is increasingly retreating from Africa as it reduces overseas development aid to increase domestic spending on defence. However, this withdrawal is enabling malign actors like Russia and China to fill the vacuum and increase their influence on political, economic and security affairs.

107. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should set out how it will ensure that reductions in overseas development aid and integrated security fund programming do not facilitate a vacuum that can be exploited by malign actors seeking advantage in Africa. We urge the Government to ensure appropriate funding is available to ensure resilient and sustainable independent media organisations are able to thrive across the African continent.

139 Q133 (Dr Dani Madrid-Morales)
140 Dr Dani Madrid-Morales (Lecturer at University of Sheffield) (DIS0035)
141 Dr Dani Madrid-Morales (Lecturer at University of Sheffield) (DIS0035); Qq130–132 (Dr Dani Madrid-Morales)

Indo-Pacific

108. Due to increased geopolitical tension in the Indo-Pacific, there is an observable rise in "coercive and aggressive state-sponsored information threats",[142] with the most consequential actor being China who is seeking to shape opinions on its core interests: Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.[143]

109. China has sought to use disinformation to support its claims in the South China Sea against the Philippines. Operation Naval Gazing saw Chinese-state linked actors amass "97,000 followers to social media accounts which supported the PRC's [People's Republic of China] aggressive maritime activities in the South China Sea and downplayed Washington's support for Manila in preserving maritime security".[144]

110. Taiwan is consistently rated among the top countries most affected by foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) campaigns, with the majority originating from China.[145] James Kynge, Chatham House outlined how China was conducting FIMI campaigns against the Taiwanese Government and armed forces and President Lai Ching-te, noting that the Taiwanese National Security Bureau had identified "disinformation messages from China to Taiwan were 2.15 million in number in 2024, compared with 1.32 million the year earlier."[146]

142 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)
143 Dr William Matthews (Senior Research Fellow for China and the World at Chatham House); Ben Bland (Director, Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House) (DIS0010)
144 Grace Theodoulou (Policy Fellow, China Observatory at Council on Geostrategy) (DIS0037)
145 Grace Theodoulou (Policy Fellow, China Observatory at Council on Geostrategy) (DIS0037)
146 Q75 (James Kynge)

Chinese-linked Storm-1376 disinformation network promoted a series of AI-generated memes of Taiwan's then-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate William Lai accusing him of embezzlement and showed a daily countdown until the election.

Source: Microsoft Threat Intelligence, Same targets, new playbooks: East Asia threat actors employ unique methods, 4 April 2024.

111. The University of Gothenburg's Variety of Democracies Project lists Taiwan as the target of more disinformation from abroad than any other democracy.[147] A report by the Thomson Foundation on AI disinformation attacks during the 2024 Presidential election highlighted fake audio, video and fabricated narratives.[148]

147 University of Gothenburg, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), accessed 16 March 2026

148 Thomson Foundation, AI Disinformation Attacks and Taiwan's 2024 Election, accessed 16 March 2026

112. China has also sought to cast doubt on the US-Taiwan relations by amplifying fake content such as "disinformation around the Taiwanese Government harvesting organs and blood and selling them to the US" and "disinformation on the US poisoning pork and exporting it to Taiwan."[149]

113. BBC News Chinese is seen as a balanced and authoritative source for Chinese speakers and remains "one of the remaining impartial news outlets in Hong Kong."[150]

114.

CONCLUSION

Taiwan is under considerable pressure as China pursues targeted foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns to sway public opinion and change the terms of international diplomatic engagement. There are increasing concerns that increased hybrid attacks are setting the ground for increased destabilisation in the South China Sea, including the invasion of Taiwan.

115.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must use all its diplomatic powers, alongside that of allies to deter Chinese disinformation targeting Taiwan. The Government should expand its bilateral relations with Taiwanese officials and civil society groups to better understand the information environment within the Indo-Pacific and sharing of best practice on countering foreign information manipulation and interference threats.

The Americas

116. Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) poses a growing threat across the Americas as malign actors seek to exploit polarised societies and undermine trust in democratic processes.

The United States

117. The United States has long been the target of FIMI from Russia, China and Iran.[151] Nina Jankowicz, CEO, American Sunlight Project and former Executive Director of the US Department of Homeland Security Disinformation Governance Board, explained how in 2024 the American Sunlight Project had identified "1,100 likely automated accounts that posted hundreds of times a day and repeatedly retweeted overt Russian propaganda within 60

149 Q89 (Andrew Yeh)
150 Hong Kong Democracy Council (DIS0014)
151 Henry Jackson Society (DIS0021)

seconds of it posting".[152] That same Russian-linked network in the last year has "posted more than 11.1 million times [...] on issues ranging from the war in Gaza to the war in Ukraine".[153]

118. Whilst Russian FIMI is being conducted at scale against the United States, Chinese FIMI has been considerably more selective, choosing to target elections.[154] Dr Jon Bateman, Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Technology and International Affairs Programme, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace also noted that China has begun "mimicking some of the efforts that Russia has traditionally been associated with in the past, involving investment in the development of online personas that can be used at a later date".[155]

119. Concerns have also been raised that there are actors within and around the Trump Administration who have "undermined, and continue to challenge, official UK government narratives, promoting disquiet and division across society".[156] Ukrainian MP Mariya Ionova raised her concerns that people within the Trump Administration were spreading Russian disinformation:

> We know there are people who know the truth, and this includes the American nation—they know the truth, and they really support Ukraine. So we just need to correct the team of Trump and their disinformation.[157]

120. Whilst Nina Jankowicz acknowledged that a pro-Russian narrative was "making its way into the US political discourse, all the way up to the highest office of the land, the Oval Office".[158]

121. In the last year, the Trump Administration has either closed, defunded or redirected significant US apparatus for combatting FIMI. This includes the Director of National Intelligence's Foreign Malign Influence Centre, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Foreign Influence Taskforce, the State Department's Global Engagement Centre as well as USAID programmes funding civil society organisations and independent media organisations like Radio Free Europe and Voice of America.[159]

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152 Q137 (Nina Jankowicz)
153 Q137 (Nina Jankowicz)
154 Q138 (Nina Jankowicz); Q143 (Jon Bateman)
155 Q143 (Jon Bateman)
156 Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham); Dr Dan Lomas (Assistant Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) (DIS0011)
157 Oral evidence taken on 20 May 2025, Q11 (Mariya Ionova)
158 Q139 (Nina Jankowicz)
159 Q144 (Nina Jankowicz)

122. As Nina Jankowicz highlights, those working on countering disinformation in the United States risk "pressure, harassment and threats", and she referred to threats against her and her family:

> for the past three and a half years, which is the entirety of the time my son has been alive—I was pregnant when I was at DHS [Department for Homeland Security]—my family has been dealing with severe threats, including death threats. We were doxxed and, as a result, had to move our residence. I had a cyber stalker. […] A lot of people surmise or suggest—those who believe in this idea that my colleagues and I are censors—that we have committed treason in the United States. Of course, one of the punishments for treason is death, so you can kind of make a logical conclusion about where things go from there.[160]

123. On 23 December 2025, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the US was imposing visa restrictions on five individuals, including two UK citizens. Marco Rubio's statement outlined that individuals were:

> […] agents of the global censorship-industrial complex […] who have led organized efforts to coerce American platforms to censor, demonetize, and suppress American viewpoints they oppose […] The Trump administration will no longer tolerate these egregious acts of extraterritorial censorship.[161]

124. On X, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers outlined these sanctioned individuals had spent their careers "fomenting censorship of American speech" and were therefore "unwelcome on American soil". She continued that some of these individuals had "collaborated with US bureaucrats on Murthy-style[162] speech suppression" and that "we're pursuing transparency, truth and reconciliation at the State Department".[163]

160 Q145 (Nina Jankowicz)

161 US State Department, Announcement of Actions to Combat the Global Censorship-Industrial Complex, 23 December 2025

162 Refers to the Supreme Court case Murthy v. Missouri which alleged the US government violated the First Amendment by coercing social media companies to remove content questioning COVID-19 origin, vaccine efficacy and electoral integrity. The Supreme Court found no evidence that the government's actions suppressed anyone's speech or that the platforms' content moderation decisions were a direct result of government coercion. The Court determined that the platforms were largely enforcing their own longstanding content-moderation policies. The Court ruled on a 6–3 decision that the plaintiffs lacked standing to sue. See Supreme Court, 23–411 Murthy v Missouri, 26 June 2024

163 X, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers, 23 December 2025

125. Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories acknowledged the Government were aware of the case and engaging the US in the appropriate way but ultimately "US visa policy is for the United States".[164]

126. Professor Rory Cormac and Dr Dan Lomas of University of Nottingham advocated that the Government's response to US interventions "be carefully calibrated in light of the political, economic and social risks involved".[165]

127. **CONCLUSION**
The United States remains the UK's closest security and defence partner, yet the evolving political landscape in Washington has introduced new strains in transatlantic cooperation on countering foreign information manipulation and interference. While both countries acknowledge the threat posed by malign disinformation actors, the Trump Administration has placed significant emphasis on defending absolute freedom of speech and has criticised European and UK legislative initiatives as forms of censorship. This has led to the Trump Administration closing key US institutions, restricting funding for independent media and civil society organisations and instigating visa bans on prominent British and European anti-disinformation experts, whom the US government has accused of attempting to suppress American viewpoints through extraterritorial censorship.

128. **RECOMMENDATION**
These tensions underscore the need for continued diplomatic dialogue with the United States. Without such efforts, divergent approaches risk weakening collective work on combatting foreign information manipulation and interference. In principle, the government should stand up for those countering disinformation, wherever in the world it occurs.

Latin America

129. Russia, China and Iran are the three most significant actors seeking to gain strategic importance in Latin America through foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) campaigns. Roberta Braga, founder and Executive Director, Digital Democracy Institute of the Americas outlined that these state actors use state-funded media outlets (e.g., RT en Español, Sputnik Mundo and HispanTV), local influencers and other proxies to

164 Q221 (Stephen Doughty MP)
165 Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham); Dr Dan Lomas (Assistant Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) (DIS0011)

disseminate their messaging of US scepticism and reinforce their multi-polar world order view.[166] The FCDO note that Russia has sought to transpose the Social Design Agency FIMI network into Latin America to assist in its control of the information ecosystem.[167]

130. Russian and Iranian FIMI campaigns are associated with supporting regimes in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba to further their own interests in the region. For example, the Iranian-state funded HispanTV disseminates content framing "Venezuela, Cuba and in this case Palestine, [...] Iran and Russia, [...] as the righteous and resilient defenders of our human rights or of power in the region. The predatory empire is the other side's position, in this case the US and Israel framed as failing, corrupt, aggressive and Nazi Zionist".[168]

131. Brazil, the largest country in Latin America, has a complex relationship to combatting FIMI. On one hand, Brazil has used its recent leadership of the G20 and hosting of the annual United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties to galvanise international support for information integrity initiatives, whilst on the other its non-alignment foreign policy sees Brazil further increasing its diplomatic relationships with Russia, China and Iran through BRICS.[169]

132. Whilst state FIMI actors like Russia and China remain active in Latin America's digital landscape, the Brazilian Government has expressed increasing concern over the role of social media platforms in enabling the spread of disinformation.

133. In August 2024, Brazil became the first democratic country in which a court order resulted in the telecommunications regulator instructing internet service providers to suspend users' access to X.[170] In April 2024, Supreme Court Justice Moraes had included Elon Musk in an ongoing investigation into the dissemination of disinformation.[171] In August 2024, X removed its legal representative from Brazil. Justice Moraes ordered X to appoint a new representative within 24 hours to comply with a requirement in Brazilian law for foreign companies to have a legal representative in the country; failure to do so would result in a shutdown and fines.[172] X failed to meet the deadline which resulted in Justice Moraes ordering the suspension of the platform's operations nationwide in August 2024, affecting over 20 million

166 Q148 (Roberta Braga)
167 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)
168 Q151 (Roberta Braga)
169 Embassy of Brazil in London (DIS0023); Q149 (Roberta Braga)
170 Associated Press, Brazil blocks Musk's X after company refuses to name local representative amid feud with judge, 31 August 2024
171 Associated Press, Elon Musk will be investigated over fake news and obstruction in Brazil after a Supreme Court order, 8 April 2024
172 Associated Press, How one Brazilian judge could suspend Elon Musk's X, 30 August 2024

users. The order was upheld by a Brazilian Supreme Court panel.[173] The ban on X was eventually lifted in October 2024 after the company complied with the judicial orders and paid the accrued fines.[174]

134. **CONCLUSION**
Latin America's information environment is becoming increasingly contested, with foreign actors seeking to exploit regional divisions and anti-US sentiment. When combined with social media companies' limited moderation capacity in Spanish and Portuguese, the risk of anti-democratic interference increases.

135. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government must work with regional partners in Latin America to support independent media and strengthen cooperation with trusted civil society organisations recognising that instability in Latin America directly affects UK diplomatic, trade and security interests and should not be treated as peripheral to the Government's counter-FIMI strategy. The Government should ensure it has the required capacity to monitor the growing threat of foreign information manipulation and interference in the region. The Government should report to this Committee within six months on how it will strengthen UK monitoring, diplomatic engagement and democratic resilience partnerships in Africa, the Indo-Pacific, Europe and the Americas.

173 BBC News, Top Brazil court upholds ban of Musk's X, 3 September 2024
174 Associated Press, Musk's X to be reinstated in Brazil after complying with Supreme Court demands, 9 October 2024

4 FCDO's approach to countering foreign information manipulation and interference

136. Information manipulation poses significant risks to UK national security and its overseas interests, requiring the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to compete against malign actors for dominance in the information space. Dr Jon Roozenbeek, King's College London likened it to the evolutionary biology Red Queen hypothesis;[175] "everyone is running just to stay in the same place".[176]

FCDO Hybrid Threats Directorate

137. The FCDO frames its work countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) under three pillars; Disrupt, Compete and Defend. Its Disrupt pillar, due to resourcing, prioritises "identifying and acting against FIMI networks that threaten the UK's national security and that of our partners, specifically Ukraine".[177] Its Compete pillar aims to "contest malign narratives and promote factual information overseas" and its Defend pillar aims to "protect the information environment, including by building resilience to disinformation".[178]

175 Leigh Van Valen proposed that in the battle for resources, species must continuously evolve just to keep up with their enemies, who themselves also evolve in response. The result is that species constantly change but, relative to their enemies, don't actually get any fitter.

176 Q23 (Dr Jon Roozenbeek)

177 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

178 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

138. The FCDO should be praised for its efforts in combatting foreign information manipulation and interference. For example, since October 2024, the Government have exposed and sanctioned 38 organisations and individuals responsible for conducting Russian information warfare against global democracies.[179]

139. However, its efforts are "dwarfed by the global scale of the problem".[180] The FCDO acknowledges that due to budgetary constraints they are unable to work across all areas of interest and instead are focusing on acute Russian threats in Europe:

> The FCDO's counter information operation efforts have been focused on countering Russian information operations in Europe, as this is where the threat the UK and European security is particularly acute and where Russia has conducted concerted information campaigns to undermine support for Ukraine and European stability. We are aware that more needs to be done to broaden our counter FIMI focus but are limited by resourcing constraints.[181]

140. Minister Stephen Doughty MP reassured the Committee that the Government recognises that efforts to combat FIMI fell within the "spending targets that the Defence Secretary and the Prime Minister have set, as well as the SDR [Strategic Defence Review] and the NSS [National Security Strategy], that covers a whole range of capabilities and resourcing beyond conventional military and security capability".[182] However, concerns remain that capabilities could be lost during the FCDO's major transformation programme (FCDO2030), though the Minister stated:

> Countering hybrid threats and FIMI remains an FCDO priority, and we recognise that maintaining this capability will continue to require investment in the right people and skills.[183]

179 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, New UK action against foreign information warfare, 9 December 2026
180 Professor Saul Newman (Professor of Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London) (DIS0005)
181 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)
182 Qq188–189 (Stephen Doughty MP)
183 Correspondence from Minister Doughty following up on the oral evidence session on 06 January, 19 January 2026

141. **CONCLUSION**
The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has acknowledged that its work on countering foreign information manipulation and interference has been limited to Europe due to funding constraints despite clear evidence that malign actors are exploiting weaker information environments in other strategically important regions. This limited funding risks the UK further losing influence in key regions such as Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Indo-Pacific as it cuts Official Development Assistance. This is especially concerning given the recent commitments by the Government to target funds to raising defence spending to achieve the NATO commitment of 3.5% of GDP by 2035 and the reorganisation of the UK Integrated Security Fund to deliver the ambitions of the National Security Strategy. Without immediate action, threat actors will continue to outspend democratic nations like the UK, increasing the challenge in combatting information operations. Strengthening the UK's soft power capability and combatting FIMI in the information war should be recognised as an integral part of the UK's defence and security strategy

142. **RECOMMENDATION**
Given the importance of combatting foreign information manipulation and interference, it is unacceptable that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is presently under-resourced. The Government should immediately rectify this by utilising the funds associated with the defence uplift to increase funding and staffing within the newly formed Hybrid Threats Directorate. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office must have the necessary resources to ensure their critical work can be conducted across all regions of interest and take forward this ministerial priority.

Media freedoms

143. Global media freedoms are a grave concern amidst an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape. Nishant Lalwani, CEO of the International Fund for Public Interest Media explained to the Committee that "media freedom has been declining over the last 13 to 15 years" and that using Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data "just 0.2% of all foreign aid is spent on supporting independent media" and with the cuts globally to Official Development Aid "there is going to be much less money available to support trustworthy journalism".[184] Nishant Lalwani argued there was a need for a dedicated, multilateral initiative, like the

184 Qq165–166 (Nishant Lalwani)

International Fund for Public Interest Media to fund independent journalism, combat foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and create a resilient information space.[185]

144. Both Nina Jankowicz, CEO, American Sunlight Project and Nishant Lalwani expressed concerns over how large language models (LLMs) are being exploited by malign actors and poisoned with disinformation, especially in non-English languages. This is particularly concerning as people increasingly consume artificial intelligence generated news summaries daily.[186]

145. The UK co-founded the Media Freedom Coalition in 2019 with Canada. The organisation brings together 51 countries from six continents to promote media freedoms and the safety of journalists and media workers. In 2022, the UK stepped down as a co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition, which the FCDO stated "allowed us to move off a campaign footing, towards mainstreaming media freedom into our wider democracy and human rights work."[187] The UK continues to be one of the three funders of the coalition's secretariat along with the governments of Canada and Germany. In July 2025, the Committee asked then–Foreign Secretary David Lammy whether the FCDO had considered re-taking the Chair of the Media Freedom Coalition.[188] The Committee later raised this again with Minister Stephen Doughty, who stated that he "will take that away".[189] On 14 February 2026, the UK was announced as the new co-Chair of the Media Freedom Coalition from March 2026. The UK will serve a two-year term.[190]

146. The predecessor Committee examined the work of the FCDO in supporting media freedoms, with the then Government providing the Committee with six-monthly reports.[191] In response to requests by the Committee for further information on the FCDO's approach to media freedoms, Stephen Doughty MP offered to "keep the Committee informed of our [FCDO] work

185 Q169 (Nishant Lalwani)
186 Qq137–138 (Nina Jankowicz); Qq166–167 (Nishant Lalwani)
187 Letter to Alicia Kearns MP, Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee, ref annual FCDO update on media freedom, 28 February 2023
188 Oral evidence taken on 8 July 2025, Q308 (Rt Hon. David Lammy MP)
189 Q237 (Stephen Doughty MP)
190 Media Freedom Coalition, The United Kingdom becomes co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition, 14 February 2026
191 Foreign Affairs Committee, Twenty-first Report of Session 2017–2019, "Media freedom is under attack": The FCO's defence of an endangered liberty, HC1920, 9 September 2019, p.12

in this area",[192] further stating that the FCDO were "acutely aware of the importance of free, independent media, strong civil society organisations and so on, as part of the collective response to this kind of activity".[193]

147. **CONCLUSION**
The need for media freedoms is greater today than it has been at any previous time. Limits are increasingly being placed on journalists which in turn endangers liberty. As funding for independent media organisations like the BBC World Service and Radio Free Europe are reduced, it is imperative that the democratic international community moves away from mere rhetoric and instead demonstrates meaningful defence of media freedoms.

148. **CONCLUSION**
The Committee welcomes the announcement that the UK Government will become the new co-Chair of the Media Freedom Coalition in March 2026, following this Committee's suggestion to Ministers. This indicates that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office are serious about protecting media freedoms. However, under previous Governments, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office committed to providing six-monthly updates to this Committee on its work on media freedoms. These have now stopped.

149. **RECOMMENDATION**
To show its continued commitment to media freedoms, the Government should again provide to the Committee six-monthly updates, including an assessment of threats to media freedom and the UK's response to foreign information manipulation and interference in priority regions.

BBC World Service

150. The BBC World Service transmits the UK's global voice around the world, providing impartial and independent news in over 40 languages. Many respondents referenced the World Service as the jewel in the UK's soft power crown and highlighted its importance as an essential tool in countering FIMI globally.[194]

192 Correspondence from Minister Doughty following up on the oral evidence session on 06 January, 19 January 2026
193 Q202 (Stephen Doughty MP)
194 Q131 (Dr Dani Madrid Morales); Daniel Berbridge (Consultant at Creative Content Support Fund / Zinc Network / Chemonics) (DIS0036); Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham); Dr Dan Lomas (Assistant Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) (DIS0011)

151. Whilst trust in the BBC hasn't changed since 2021, trust in state-backed disruptors such as CGTN and RT has increased.[195] Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic, University of Manchester told the Committee that her research showed that:

> In the Arab-speaking world, RT was ahead of the BBC and CNN in engagement, and it was below only Al Jazeera. RT was doing very well with its influence there, and it has also been doing well in Latin America. It is now increasing its market in Africa because that did not used to be its target, but now it is after the bans in the west.[196]

152. The BBC World Service draw attention to its work in countering disinformation propagated by state and other actors within and across national borders, noting that BBC News Russia is weekly reaching "nearly 5 million despite being blocked across the country", whilst in Iran the BBC World Service reaches "13.5 million despite persistent blocking".[197]

153. BBC Monitoring, for example, provides reliable and independent reporting on the world's mass media using open-source information. It is integral to identifying and analysing disinformation and propaganda narratives from 150 countries in 100 languages, which is of critical importance to our intelligence and security machinery.[198]

154. At present the BBC World Service operates with approximately £400 million in costs per year. About a third of costs (£137 million) comes from the FCDO as grant-in-aid with the remaining two-thirds is funded by the licence fee.[199] Prior to 2010, the BBC World Service was directly funded by Government, an arrangement that had stood for 75 years. Whilst the FCDO provided the BBC World Service with an uplift of £32.6 million for financial year 2025/26, the then BBC Director General Tim Davie told the Committee that although these funds "protects the World Service from the cutting of language services in the round" they had "wanted about £20 million more".[200] Jonathan Munro, Global Director and Deputy CEO of BBC News told the Committee that whilst "Russia and China combined are spending about £8 billion a year" on its broadcasters, the UK Government was spending "about £400 million".[201]

155. The decision to fund the BBC World Service through the license fee, which has been frozen for the last two years, was ill-advised and has drastically impacted the work it has been able to conduct, leading to a reduction in its global footprint. This is evidenced where the BBC World Service has been

195 BBC and Tapestry Research, Global Influence and Impact Research, 12 May 2025, p.19
196 Q9 (Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic)
197 BBC World Service (DIS0046)
198 BBC World Service (DIS0046)
199 House of Commons Library debate pack, Funding of the BBC World Service, 24 June 2025
200 Oral evidence taken on 17 December 2024, Qq1–2 (Tim Davie)
201 Oral evidence taken on 17 December 2024, Q5 (Jonathan Munro)

forced to scale back or cut its language services, state actors have filled the void. In the case of Lebanon, the Russian state-backed radio channel Sputnik is now broadcasting on the frequency previously used by BBC Arabic.[202]

156. The Committee agrees with the BBC World Service's call for the Government to "set the World Service on a path to bold ambitious growth with a stable and long-term funding mechanism that comes from central government budgets".[203]

157. The Government announced on 19 March that it would increase funding of the BBC World Service by an additional £11 million per year for the next three years, an 8% increase on the previous year's contribution. The long-term funding for the BBC World Service will be decided through the Royal Charter review."[204]

158. On 13 March, the Committee of Public Accounts published its report into the BBC World Service. The Committee warns that the "BBC's ability to carry out long-term planning of the World Service is hampered by repeated short-term funding agreements from the [FCDO]" and recommends that "the Treasury should provide the BBC World Service with a dedicated Spending Review line to enable multi-year and timely funding settlements".[205]

159. **CONCLUSION**

The BBC World Service plays a critical role in providing life-saving information and updates during conflict and crisis, whilst leading the global fight against disinformation and promoting democratic values. Much of the evidence received by the Committee highlights the essential role of the BBC World Service and calls on the Government to ensure its continued functions through increased funding. We welcome the Government's announcement that it will increase funding of the BBC World Service by an additional £11 million per year for the next three years. It is essential that the BBC World Service is provided with the necessary funding to ensure it continues to tackle the threat of disinformation by providing independent, impartial journalism to a global audience.

202 Mr Jonathan Morley-Davies (Research Manager at Albany Associates Int Ltd) (DIS0019); BBC News, BBC boss warns of Russian and Chinese propaganda, 14 October 2024

203 BBC World Service (DIS0046)

204 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Foreign Secretary statement on International Development: 19 March, 19 March 2026

205 Committee of Public Accounts, Seventy-second Report of Session 2024–26, BBC World Service, HC 1299, 13 March 2026

160. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government must recognise that accurate, impartial news is essential to the UK's national security and overseas interests and should be treated by Government as a strategic national asset in an era of information warfare. At a time when the UK is reducing its Official Development Assistance and disinformation is spreading globally, the BBC World Service, is widely regarded as the world's most trusted international broadcaster. Whilst we welcome the additional funding being provided by the Government over the next three years, this is nominal increase but due to inflation is likely to be a flat settlement. Therefore, the Government should provide the BBC World Service with a further increased funding settlement, drawn in part from the defence budget, so it can plan, invest, and deliver its services effectively. It should also be made clear that funding from the Ministry of Defence would be provided with appropriate safeguards and commitments to ensure that the BBC World Service is able to continue to operate independent of Government. If the BBC World Service does not receive the funding it needs, it will continue to contract with a diminishing influence. Its loss would significantly diminish the UK's soft power and undermine our ability to counter information warfare.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

161. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a dual-edged sword in regard to foreign information manipulation and interference. Whilst AI tools have "democratised the creation and spread of manipulated content, meaning that almost anyone with an internet connection can now generate misleading or false information at scale",[206] they also offer the ability to "monitor the proliferation of false narratives and disinformation disseminated in multiple languages and across a range of platforms".[207]

162. Generative AI has lowered the barrier to access and enables malign actors to increase the speed of generation and dissemination as well as audience research and the translation of content into multiple languages.[208] One such example is the use of AI generated deepfakes against female electoral candidates in Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia.[209]

206 Professor Oli Buckley (Professor of Cyber Security at Loughborough University) (DIS0003)
207 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)
208 Q11 (Dr Jon Roozenbeek); Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham); Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham); Dr Dan Lomas (Assistant Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) (DIS0011); University College London (DIS0024); Logically (DIS0028); The Alan Turing Institute (CETaS) (DIS0030)
209 ShePersisted (DIS0027)

163. NATO has emphasised the potential of AI to identify, monitor and mitigate the spread of foreign information manipulation and interference.[210] The FCDO told the Committee it uses "internal and third-party tools with AI-enhanced capabilities to monitor the proliferation of false narratives and disinformation disseminated in multiple languages and across a range of platforms by FIMI networks."[211]

164. **CONCLUSION**
Artificial Intelligence's (AI) proliferation over the last few years has ushered a new digital era by invigorating research and innovation, whilst introducing unique challenges to national security. AI offers malicious users the opportunities to create novel content at speed, greatly increasing their reach and impact. However, it can also be deployed by defenders to analyse patterns, detecting campaigns before they can cause widespread harm.

165. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should establish an AI counter disinformation sandbox to test the boundaries of regulation and technology. The sandbox should facilitate experimentation of AI tools across Whitehall, the intelligence community and trusted international partners.

Cooperation with European partners

166. Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is a significant national security challenge for the UK and its partners. Professor Saul Newman, Goldsmiths University of London argued that the UK "should pursue greater cooperation with European partners at a security and government level" given the existential threat.[212]

167. The EU and the UK signed a Security and Defence Partnership on 19 May 2025. The Partnership institutionalises dialogue and consultation mechanisms and presents opportunities for the UK to attend EU meetings. The UK and EU commit to structured dialogues around agreed areas of

210 Dr Tine Munk (Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Nottingham Trent University) (DIS0008)
211 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)
212 Professor Saul Newman (Professor of Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London) (DIS0005)

cooperation including on countering hybrid threats and FIMI.[213] The EU and UK have so far held three Strategic Consultations on Russia and Ukraine, the Western Balkans, and Hybrid Threats.[214]

168. The Government in July 2025 also signed the UK-France Lancaster House 2.0 Declaration[215] and the UK-Germany Treaty on Friendship and Bilateral Cooperation.[216] These both included commitments to increase cooperation to tackle foreign information manipulation and interference with France and Germany respectively.

169. The Minister for Europe, North America, Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty MP told the Committee that the Government was looking at the EU Commissions Democracy Shield "with interest".[217] The Minister admitted that "there needs to be much more co-ordination" but argued "there has been a step change in our level of engagement with individual partner countries and Europe-wide"[218] and had recently taken part "directly in discussions with the European Union around hybrid threats".[219]

170. However, as we recommended in our UK-EU reset Report, there is a need for the UK to better utilise mechanisms and bilateral agreements to "identify opportunities for joint action on strategic priorities" with the European Union.[220] Greater coordination with allies would reduce the constraints the FCDO are currently operating under, ensuring maximum effect.

171. **CONCLUSION**
Tackling the threat of foreign information manipulation and interference requires dedicated and long-standing cooperation with allies. Whilst we welcome the Government's increased engagement with EU partners, there is a need to move faster and significantly increase coordination to deter malign actors.

213 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Ministry of Defence, Security and defence partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 19 May 2025
214 European Union External Action Service, HR/VP Kallas holds first EU–UK Foreign and Security Policy Dialogue, 24 October 2025
215 Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Lancaster House 2.0: Declaration on Modernising UK-French Defence and Security Cooperation, 10 July 2025
216 Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Federal Republic of Germany on friendship and bilateral cooperation, 17 July 2025
217 Q196 (Stephen Doughty MP)
218 Q198 (Stephen Doughty MP)
219 Q196 (Stephen Doughty MP)
220 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 2024–26, From a Common Understanding to Common Ground: Building a UK-EU Strategic Partnership fit for the future, HC857, 4 March 2026

172. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should initiate the first UK-EU dialogue under the Security and Defence Partnership on foreign information manipulation and interference. The Government should also outline how it is using the Security and Defence Partnership and other bilateral agreements with EU partners to strengthen cooperation in detecting and responding to foreign information manipulation and interference to increase the cost for malign actors seeking to interfere in democracies.

5 The UK's domestic response to foreign information manipulation and interference threats

173. The Government has recognised that it must increase its defensive posture with the 2025 Strategic Defence Review and National Security Strategy calling for a 'whole-of-society' approach to defend against hybrid attacks,[221] which are increasingly being adopted by the UK's adversaries.[222] It is therefore essential that the UK has effective cross-departmental coordination to ensure it can effectively repel foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) that threaten the UK's overseas interests as well as the UK itself.

174. However, over the course of this inquiry, the Committee has grown concerned about how effective the UK's domestic structure is for combatting FIMI, and foreign interference more broadly.

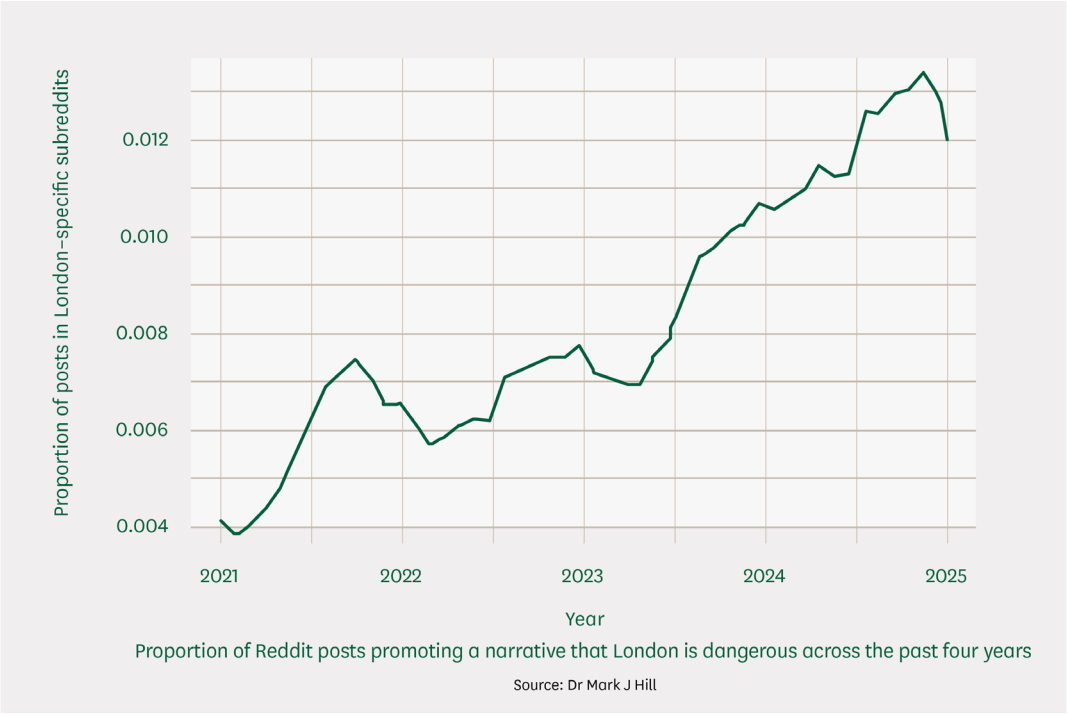
175. Recent examples of potential FIMI campaigns targeting the UK include analysis of Reddit accounts by Dr Mark J. Hill, King's College London who found a year-on-year increase in the number of posts claiming London is "dangerous" and "lawless", rising from 874 in 2008 to 258,444 in 2024. A number of the accounts posting this content appear to be generated by artificial intelligence, but it is unclear who is behind these accounts.[223] Another example is that of more than 1300 X accounts purporting to be young, Scottish pro-independence activists. Following the bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities ordered by President Trump, these supposedly pro-

221 Attacks which do not necessarily meet the legal threshold for war including the use of FIMI, sabotage and assassination.

222 Ministry of Defence, Strategic Defence Review - Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad, 02 June 2025; Cabinet Office, National Security Strategy 2025: Security for the British People in a Dangerous World, 24 June 2025

223 The Standard, 'London is not what it was': How social media accounts are changing the narrative of the capital, 04 January 2026

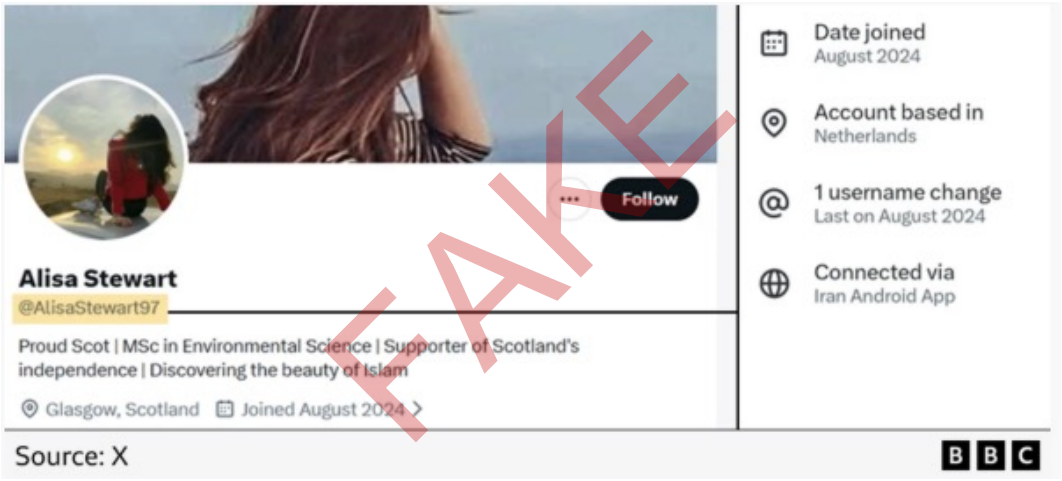
Scottish independence X accounts began posting content endorsing then Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei before switching back to promoting pro-Scottish independence narratives.[224]



Four-year increase in proportion of Reddit posts promoting narratives that London is dangerous.

Source: The Standard, 'London is not what it was': How social media accounts are changing the narrative of the capital, 4 January 2026.

224 The Times, Interference inquiry will look at Iranian support for independence, 17 December 2025; The Times, 'Proud Scots' for independence exposed as Iran-based troll network, 24 November 2025



Iranian-based X account falsely claiming to be based in Scotland. The account was posting almost exclusively pro-Scottish independence content. Many of these accounts suddenly stopped posting content following the Iranian internet blackouts in June before beginning to post content again a few weeks later.

Source: BBC Verify, How X's new location feature exposed big US politics accounts, 24 November 2025.

176. The Committee asked Wifredo Fernández what action X had taken against these Iranian accounts which had been viewed more than 224 million times. In response he explained that X actioned a number of accounts following media reporting and internal team detection.[225]

Delivery of counter FIMI policy and strategy

177. There are seven Government departments with responsibilities for combatting FIMI. The overseas branch of the Government structures is delivered by the FCDO, which is responsible for countering FIMI in third countries, with the Ministry of Defence providing additional capabilities for countering hybrid threats, including through the British Army's 77th Brigade. Domestically, the Home Office,[226] leads on addressing malign information activity aimed at UK audiences, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology[227] is responsible for online safety and information threats in the UK. Further capacity is provided by the Cabinet Office, which has overarching responsibilities for national security and crises, the Department

225 Q347 (Wifredo Fernandez)
226 Correspondence with the Minister for Security, Home Office, and Minister of State, Cabinet Office, relating to disinformation, 26 January 2026
227 Correspondence with the Minister for AI and Online Safety, DSIT, relating to disinformation, 16 January 2026

for Culture, Media and Sport for media, and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government[228] having responsibility for elections. In addition, the security and intelligence agencies, among others, provide further support for the Government's approach to countering FIMI.

178. These disparate responsibilities are brought together under the Defending Democracy Taskforce, chaired by the Security Minister Dan Jarvis MP, and the Joint Election Security and Preparedness Unit, co-chaired by the Security Minister and the Elections Minister Samantha Dixon MP.[229] This architecture is specifically structured for election security rather than a whole-of-society approach to defending against all targets of FIMI. Indeed, FCDO acknowledges that "there is more work to be done to cohere all relevant departments around agreed information threats approaches, supported by delineated remits and aligned structures" and seeks to "address gaps in capability over this parliamentary cycle".[230] Further, the Government's social cohesion strategy, published on 10 March, acknowledges the threat that FIMI poses to community cohesion and national security and "demands a robust, joined-up response from government."[231]

179. We heard repeatedly that the Government's approach to countering FIMI is fragmented and lacks a coherent strategy, leaving the UK vulnerable.[232] It was argued that the UK should consider establishing an institution to consolidate and coordinate a coherent response to the threat of FIMI, drawing on international examples from allies like Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation, and France's Vigilance and Protection against Foreign Digital Interference service (VIGINUM).[233]

228 Correspondence with the Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy, MHCLG, relating to disinformation, 22 January 2026

229 Correspondence with the Minister for Security, Home Office, and Minister of State, Cabinet Office, relating to disinformation, 26 January 2026; Correspondence with the Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy, MHCLG, relating to disinformation, 22 January 2026

230 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (DIS0029)

231 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom, 10 March 2026, p.31

232 Dr Adam Ure (Director at Lvivski) (DIS0038); Professor Oli Buckley (Professor of Cyber Security at Loughborough University) (DIS0003); Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham); Dr Dan Lomas (Assistant Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) (DIS0011); University College London (DIS0024)

233 University College London (DIS0024)

180. **CONCLUSION**
It is our view that the Government has created an unnecessarily fragmented approach to countering foreign information manipulation and interference, with no one department or associated body taking overall leadership. This has created a system which seems to prioritise discussion and bureaucracy over action. A more effective model already exists. In 2016, the Government established the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), within GCHQ, bringing together government, intelligence agencies and the private sector into one organisation, providing expert advice and guidance on cyber security. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has significantly strengthened the UK's understanding of, and the response to, the most important cyber threats domestically and internationally.

181. **RECOMMENDATION**
To ensure a whole-of-society approach, the Government should establish a public-facing National Counter Disinformation Centre. The UK's National Counter Disinformation Centre should be placed on a statutory footing, be subject to oversight by Parliament, and be directed to understand, identify and combat foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns being directed against the UK and its interests. The National Counter Disinformation Centre should be similar to Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation, and France's Vigilance and Protection against Foreign Digital Interference service (VIGINUM).

182. **CONCLUSION**
The UK's overseas diplomatic presence is vital to understanding and countering foreign information manipulation and interference. We are concerned that at present the Government is not adequately utilising the expertise and evidence collated by its overseas network to inform its domestic approach to combatting foreign information manipulation and interference.

183. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should in response to this report provide evidence to the Committee on how it utilises its overseas network to detect, defend and deter foreign information manipulation and interference and how these insights are informing policy responses.

Public understanding

184. Whilst the UK Government are undertaking positive measures to defend against foreign information manipulation and interference, both overseas and domestically, the general public is largely unaware of these efforts or the increasing risk of foreign interference in the UK.

185. Ciaran Martin CB, founding Director of the National Cyber Security Centre suggested there should be four tests for reviewing the UK's democratic resilience:

- is the UK's legal framework keeping pace with FIMI innovations?
- is the UK's media free and robust?
- is the UK's social capital response adequate? and
- what technical innovations can we encourage and, if necessary, mandate?[234]

186. Sir William Browder KCMG, CEO of Hermitage Capital Management and Head of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign highlighted the work of the European Union's East Strategic Communication Task Force's EUvsDisinfo project and recommended that the UK Government should launch a similar service which "debunks foreign propaganda and disinformation in real time".[235]

234 Q258 (Ciaran Martin CB)

235 Sir William Browder KCMG (CEO; Head at Hermitage Capital Management; Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign) (DIS0031); Professor Oli Buckley (Professor of Cyber Security at Loughborough University) (DIS0003)

187. **CONCLUSION**
There is an apparent lack of public awareness about disinformation campaigns from foreign malign actors. By exposing the broader public to the threat of malicious content the Government can inoculate the target audience from the threat of disinformation. Public awareness campaigns are an easily accessible method for the government to spread reliable information across multiple channels and are under-utilised by the Government at present. It was suggested that publicising disinformation campaigns might do the malign actors' jobs for them and undermine confidence in essential democratic institutions and processes. If these campaigns posed no danger to our democracy and it can be said with complete confidence that these campaigns have no effect on public opinion, then we would have some sympathy with this approach. However, our experience tells us that we cannot afford to be complacent. To defeat this hybrid warfare we must enlist the public and empower them with the necessary tools to identify disinformation and make their own informed decisions.

188. **RECOMMENDATION**
The government should launch a public awareness campaign to educate citizens about the risk of foreign information manipulation and interference. This should include the measures taken and mechanisms in place to protect democratic institutions. Additionally, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office should launch a publicly accessible information portal to document the scale and aims of disinformation campaigns, similar to the European External Action Services' highly-effective EUvsDisinfo resource.

189. **CONCLUSION**
We are concerned that the government is in part restricting public awareness regarding the threat of foreign information manipulation and interference due to an unwillingness to declassify intelligence. It is the Committee's opinion that there is a culture of secrecy and overclassification, especially for state threats which risk leaving Parliament and the public in the dark.

190. **RECOMMENDATION**
Where examples would resonate with the public, the Government and the National Security Community should declassify information relating to foreign information manipulation and interference. In addition, the Government should provide Parliamentarians and other key stakeholders (e.g., civil society organisations and media organisations) with regular briefings on their work to combat foreign information manipulation and interference as well as training to identify and report disinformation campaigns. This should mirror the offerings provided by the National Cyber Security Centre for cyber security and resilience.

Media literacy

191. Increasing individuals' media literacy is frequently cited as key technique in countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).[236] However, media literacy initiatives can suffer from a lack of speed, scale and crucially long-term funding. Additionally, media literacy initiatives are often focused solely at children rather than taking a holistic whole-of-society approach, that acknowledges that adults, especially those over the age of 65, should equally be empowered to make informed decisions on their media consumption.

192. Eliot Higgins and Dr Natalie Martin advocate the teaching of open-source intelligence in educational settings to "empower news-consumers with skills and the critical mindset to make their own minds up."[237]

193. The Baltic and Nordic states are often cited for the excellence in media literacy policy and strategy, in the face of continued Russian hybrid warfare. They have prioritised, and demonstrated, a whole-of-society approach. For example, Finland adopts a lifelong, system-wide approach to media literacy, embedding it across all stages of education and supported by coordinated national policy. Media education begins in early childhood through guided play and experimentation, helping children explore media safely and creatively. As pupils progress through primary and secondary education, they learn to evaluate media content in a critical manner. Outside of school, public libraries and social services provide media skills

236 Professor Saul Newman (Professor of Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London) (DIS0005); Professor Brian Ball (Professor of Philosophy at Northeastern University London) (DIS0025); Daniel Berbridge (Consultant at Creative Content Support Fund / Zinc Network / Chemonics) (DIS0036); BBC Media Action (DIS0047)

237 University of Nottingham, Bellingcat (DIS0002)

training to adults as well as supporting digital inclusion. Finland also runs an annual, nationwide Media Literacy Week acknowledging that the media environment is constantly changing, requiring lifelong learning.[238]

194. The Electoral Commission told the Committee that it is planning to undertake a digital literacy campaign to educate the UK population about electoral integrity, taking lessons from Nordic-Baltic countries.[239]

195. Ofcom was given specific duties to promote media literacy by the Communications Act 2003, which were further clarified and specified by the Online Safety Act 2023, including heightening public awareness and help users understand and reduce exposure to mis- and disinformation.[240] However, in a letter to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy in April 2025, Ofcom said that "media literacy is everyone's business: it is not Ofcom's role to do it all".[241] This demonstrates the lack of coordination between Government and associated bodies and begs the question whose job is it? Furthermore, given Ofcom's increase regulatory scope it is unclear what additional resources it has been provided to assist in this essential work.

196. The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee published its report into Media Literacy on 25 July 2025, and much of their findings echoes evidence received by this Committee including that:

> A failure to prioritise media literacy in the UK presents a threat not only to individual citizens, but to democracy itself […] UK citizens are poorly equipped to navigate today's increasingly crowded information environment. Urgent action from Government is needed.[242]

197. On 10 March 2026, the Government published its social cohesion strategy outlining the Government's intention to publish a "Media Literacy Action Plan to set out cross-government actions to build resilience to misinformation, disinformation and harmful online content".[243] The Government subsequently published its media literacy action plan on 16 March, outlining actions for the next three years to "help people across the

238 Professor Oli Buckley (Professor of Cyber Security at Loughborough University) (DIS0003); Q258 (Ciaran Martin CB); Finland Toolbox, Media Literacy and Education in Finland, accessed 12 March 2026

239 Q302 (Vijay Rangarajan CMG)

240 Ofcom, Ofcom's final three-year media literacy strategy, 07 October 2024, p.4

241 Letter from the Chair of the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy to the Security Minister regarding the Defending Democracy Taskforce, 16 July 2025

242 House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, 3rd report of Session 2024–25, Media Literacy, HL 163, para 24, 25 July 2025

243 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom, 10 March 2026, pp.41–42

UK think critically about online content, find trustworthy information, and make the most of digital opportunities."[244] The action plan sets an ambition that by 2029, "people can confidently recognise misinformation and know where to find trusted information."[245] To achieve this, the Government intends to run dedicated media literacy education programmes and campaigns, improve the accessibility and availability of trusted online information, and ensure a coordinated approach across national and devolved government, Ofcom and the wider sector.

198. Mainstream media also plays an essential role in delivering accurate, independently verified information to the public, ensuring people have the knowledge they need to make informed decisions. It also serves as a frontline defence against FIMI by conducting investigative journalism, exposing deceptive narratives and networks, and providing crucial context during complex events. In doing so, mainstream media supports public trust, strengthens democratic discourse, and helps society navigate an increasingly saturated information landscape.

199. **CONCLUSION**

The UK Government has indicated it will take an all-of-society approach through various commitments outlined in the Strategic Defence Review, National Security Strategy and the Resilience Action Plan. Yet media literacy was notably absent. Whilst we welcome the Government's media literacy action plan, it places no overt responsibilities on social media platforms to support efforts to improve media literacy and does not include actions to inform the public about foreign malign actors spreading disinformation. If this responsibility continues to sit with Ofcom, the Committee is concerned that it may lack the capacity to undertake this role.

200. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Government must not overlook media literacy as part of its all-of-society approach to strengthening and securing the UK's national security, including foreign information manipulation and interference from malign actors. The Government should seek to learn best practice from Baltic and Nordic countries and apply them to the UK, ensuring its approach focuses on all ages, not just the under-16s.

244 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, A Safe, Informed Digital Nation; Government's Media Literacy Action Plan (2026–2029), 16 March 2026, p.5

245 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, A Safe, Informed Digital Nation; Government's Media Literacy Action Plan (2026–2029), 16 March 2026, p.9

Social media companies

201. Social media, search engines and end-to-end encrypted online messaging platforms play a dual role in foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), as amplifiers and potential allies in countering FIMI content.

202. Meta, TikTok and X told the Committee that their platforms sought to combat FIMI which aims to use inauthentic coordinated accounts to manipulate and influence public discourse.[246] They all noted that Russian-linked networks were the most prolific, followed by Iran and China.

203. David Agranovich, Director of Global Threat Disruption at Meta, noted that enforcement actions seek to "remove everything that is part of that network" and where possible "identify the people and organisations behind those clandestine influence operations."[247] All the platforms recognised the need to share information with law enforcement, regulators and governments to ensure effective actions against FIMI. David Agranovich also noted that this information sharing enabled governments to indict, sanction or impose other real-world consequences which "can be significantly more effective" than platform takedowns alone.[248]

204. Ali Law, Director of Public Policy for Northern Europe at TikTok, explained that TikTok had seen "a continued and substantial set of actions by hostile actors trying to influence democratic elections".[249] Ali Law further explained that TikTok publish on a month-by-month basis transparency data on covert influence operations on their platform, including network origin, who it is targeting, narratives used, number of accounts involved and the number of followers.[250]

205. The underpinning algorithms are designed to "maximise engagement rather than accuracy", creating a feedback loop that further entrenches ideologies and distrust.[251] The fundamental design of the algorithms leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. This includes for hire troll farms who are financially incentivised to spread disinformation by manipulating platform algorithms.[252]

246 Q341 (Ali Law); Q343 (Dr Wifredo Fernandez); Q346 (David Agranovich)
247 Q351 (David Agranovich)
248 Q351 (David Agranovich)
249 Q340 (Ali Law)
250 Q341 (Ali Law)
251 University of Nottingham, Bellingcat (DIS0002); Logically (DIS0028)
252 UK-China Transparency (DIS0006)

206. Wifredo Fernández was also challenged on the potential of X's algorithm having a political bias, favouring the right of politics, he explained that X was like a "local pub, where a lot of banter and discussion happens".[253] When further challenged about recent research claiming that X's feed algorithm was pushing political opinion "in a more conservative manner"[254] he dismissed this by stating the research was based on data from three years ago and was "not really relevant to the algorithm that you are experiencing today".[255]He also suggested that users should use X's feedback system to modify their recommender algorithm.[256]

207. The Committee questioned whether the current reporting systems established by social media platforms, as well as state institutions, are fit for a social media world in which information is spread and disseminated at speed.

208. David Agranovich highlighted that state-linked influence operations often lie dormant waiting to activate in response to an ongoing crisis. Using Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, Meta observed:

> dormant accounts, often in countries like Romania and Moldova, that did not have a lot of activity. But when the war began, within about a week they had pivoted to targeting issues around Russia's invasion. When we identified those networks, we took them down immediately.[257]

209. Meta, TikTok and X all said they now utilise automated systems, built using past content removals, to help identify and act on FIMI.[258] But as these platforms scale back their human moderation teams, concerns have been raised that their ability to properly identify and respond to deceptive activity is being weakened.[259] There is also growing concern that as AI is increasingly used to conduct moderation, it may misread context, falsely labelling legitimate posts as harmful.

210. Dame Melanie Dawes, Chief Executive of Ofcom explained to the Committee that the Codes of Practice for user-to-user services and search services and illegal harms guidance have been in force since March 2025. These set out rules for combatting illegal content, such as the Foreign Interference Offence. Where platforms fail to meet these duties, Ofcom can take enforcement action.[260] Critically, the Online Safety Act 2023 does not impose

253 Q404 (Wifredo Fernandez)
254 Nature, The political effects of X's feed algorithm, January 2026
255 Qq407–410 (Wifredo Fernandez)
256 Q410 (Wifredo Fernandez)
257 Q352 (David Agranovich)
258 Q351 (David Agranovich)
259 Professor Oli Buckley (Professor of Cyber Security at Loughborough University) (DIS0003)
260 Correspondence with Ofcom relating to disinformation, 17 February 2026

explicit duties on Ofcom or social media platforms to identify or act on misinformation or disinformation, except where it overlaps with illegal content or harms to children.

211. Additionally, there are concerns that the owners of social media companies could alter platform algorithms "in response to commercial and regulatory pressures from the United States" or ideological preferences.[261] Vijay Rangarajan CMG, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission told the Committee he was:

> […] concerned that platform algorithms could be used in a partisan way to amplify or suppress political party posts to influence an election […] There is currently nothing in legislation which addresses this issue, or requires platforms to provide transparency over their algorithms.[262]

212. The Committee repeatedly heard calls for social media companies to provide algorithmic transparency data to allow independent researchers the ability to assess how platforms are promoting content to users as well as their actions to counter inauthentic coordinated behaviour.[263] X told the Committee that it was the only social media company that publishes its recommendation algorithm and "welcome the study and scrutiny of it."[264] However, it was noted that X requires a pay per use to access data, and this data is strictly controlled such as limits on distributing data and requirements for written approval for larger datasets. This is not equivalent to providing legitimate access to independent researchers to independently verify platform behaviours in combatting widespread disinformation.

213. During their appearance in front of the Committee, all three platforms were questioned on their obligations under the Online Safety Act. TikTok demonstrated a clear understanding of how their internal policies aligned with regulatory duties and provided examples. Whilst we acknowledge that Meta's representative was their Director of Global Threats, both Meta and X focused considerably on mechanisms for content removal rather than their compliance responsibilities.[265] Similarly, when examining platforms response to the National Security Act's foreign interference offence, only TikTok's representative demonstrated familiarity, citing a specific example of an Iranian-origin covert influence network targeting the UK.[266] By contrast, Meta and X provided examples of influence operations but did not articulate

261 Professor Oli Buckley (Professor of Cyber Security at Loughborough University) (DIS0003)
262 Vijay Rangarajan CMG (Chief Executive at Electoral Commission) (DIS0055)
263 Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) (DIS0032); Professor Brian Ball (Professor of Philosophy at Northeastern University London) (DIS0025)
264 Q414 (Wifredo Fernández)
265 Qq351–352 (David Agranovich)
266 Q342, Q429 (Ali Law)

how their detection frameworks map onto the foreign interference offence and were not aware of any particular case.[267] This raises concerns about whether platforms, especially those with teams largely based outside the UK, fully understand their statutory responsibilities.

214. We welcome the Government's intention to further secure online spaces in its recent social cohesion strategy. We note the Government's intention to require platforms to publish regular transparency reports to increase public understanding of compliance, provide "independent researchers access to platform data so they can help to build the evidence base to hold companies to account".[268]

215. **CONCLUSION**
Social media companies are a key component in tackling the dissemination of foreign information manipulation and interference. It is our opinion that they are failing to tackle the threat of foreign interference on their platforms. The continued lack of algorithmic transparency by social media companies is restricting legitimate access by policymakers, academics and civil society who are seeking to examine how their content ranking systems are designed and potentially abused by malign actors posting controversial and incendiary content. This is not about policing content, but the design and processes used by online platforms to retain the engagement of users and its vulnerability to abuse.

216. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should require social media companies to publish algorithmic transparency data (logic and biases), provide legitimate data access to researchers free of charge and without cumbersome restrictions, and oblige platforms to publish an annual report on the detection of artificial amplification and foreign interference and the subsequent actions taken to remove such content.

The UK's domestic legislation

217. The Online Safety Act 2023 and the National Security Act 2023's foreign interference offence are the principal domestic legislative tools for combatting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).

267 Qq427–428 (David Agranovich, Wifredo Fernández)
268 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom, 10 March 2026, pp.41–42

218. The Online Safety Act established a range of duties for online service providers, to protect users' safety on the platforms. The Online Safety Act largely focuses on the protection of children, requiring platforms to prevent children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content as well as mandating that there are clear and accessible means for reporting potential breaches.[269]

219. The Online Safety Act also places additional duties on categorised services, with Category 1 services required to provide transparency reporting, enhanced requirements on risk assessments, and protections for news publishers and journalistic content, and content of democratic importance.[270] However, Ofcom announced in November that the categorisation register will be published in July 2026, one year later than originally planned.[271] Secretary of State Liz Kendall in response expressed her concerns about the delays to the implementation and emphasised that Ofcom needs to maintain momentum and explore other mechanisms to expedite processes.[272]

220. The Online Safety Act has no specific reference to disinformation outside of mandating Ofcom establish and maintain an Advisory Committee on Disinformation and Misinformation, providing specific advice on this topic to Ofcom. The Committee was not established until April 2025, nearly two years after the Act was passed, and its name was changed to the Online Information Advisory Committee and its terms of reference were narrowed from that first published by Ofcom to explicitly state the Committee would only advise on content strictly regulated by the Act, rather than legal but harmful content such as health conspiracies and electoral misinformation.[273]

221. The Online Safety Act requires social media companies to conduct risk assessments in relation to illegal content, including the risk of the service being used to facilitate or commit a priority offence. A priority offence includes a foreign interference offence under section 13 of the National Security Act 2023. Platforms are required to have systems in place for the removal of illegal content[274] when alerted to its presence, but as the Online Safety Network note "a service does not need to take it all down to satisfy

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269 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, Online Safety Act: explainer, 24 April 2025

270 The Online Safety Act 2023 (Category 1, Category 2A and Category 2B Threshold Conditions) Regulations 2025

271 Ofcom, Ofcom's approach to implementing the Online Safety Act, 12 November 2025

272 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, Implementation and enforcement of the Online Safety Act: follow up letter from DSIT Secretary of State to Ofcom, 12 November 2025

273 Ofcom, Online Information Advisory Committee, 1 May 2025; Full Fact, Disinformation and misinformation must remain the primary focus of Ofcom's Committee, 26 April 2025

274 'Illegal content' includes content which amounts to a priority offence such as an offence of foreign interference under section 13 of the National Security Act 2023.

the duty—the duty relates to having an appropriate system in place".[275] Category 1 services[276] under the Online Safety Act are only required to take specific actions in relation to their terms of services, and as there is no minimum standard, platforms are able to set them at any level or alter them in response to crisis or emergency.[277] In addition, section 179 of the Online Safety Act 2023 establishes a false communications offence. The offence is committed where an individual knows information to be false but sends it intending to cause non-trivial psychological or physical harm to a likely audience and the individual has no reasonable excuse for sending the message.

222. UK legislation does not provide for personality rights as such that would allow an individual to control the use of their likeness outside of non-consensual intimate images so individuals have to look for other ways to protect the use of their image such as the law of passing off, copyright or privacy which may not provide full cover.[278] There have been calls for such a statutory personality right to address the threat of deepfakes. In June 2025, Denmark set out proposals to amend its Copyright Act to provide citizens a statutory copyright over their faces, voices and bodies.[279] The amendments, due to enter into force on 31 March 2026, would enable Danish citizens to demand the removal of non-consensual deepfakes and claim compensation.

223. Vijay Rangarajan, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission noted that UK politics has already seen deepfakes of a sitting MP falsely claiming that he had defected to a different political party.[280] The deepfake was not deemed to have constituted a criminal offence as it occurred outside an electoral period. Vijay Rangarajan indicated that more work was needed to

275 UK-China Transparency (DIS0006)

276 Social media platforms will be classified as Category 1 Services if it; has an average number of monthly active United Kingdom users that exceeds 34 million and uses a content recommender system, or has an average number of monthly active United Kingdom users that exceeds 7 million, uses a content recommender system and provides a functionality for users to forward or share regulated user-generated content on the service with other users of that service. See The Online Safety Act 2023 (Category 1, Category 2A and Category 2B Threshold Conditions) Regulations 2025

277 UK-China Transparency (DIS0006)

278 In particular the Online Safety Act 2023 created offences for sharing intimate images without consent, including deepfakes. The Data Use and Access Act 2025 made it a criminal offence to create of request non-consensual sexualised deepfakes and Section 106 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 criminalises false statements about a candidate's character or conduct to affect their return at an election. It is unclear whether a deepfake of a political candidate would trigger this offence.

279 The Guardian, Denmark to tackle deepfakes by giving people copyright to their own features, 27 June 2025

280 Q290 (Vijay Rangarajan)

explore whether current electoral law is fit for purpose and warned that the "groundwork for foreign interference is laid entirely between elections, and then it is activated later on."[281]

224. The Government published its Report on Copyright and AI pursuant to section 136 of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 on 18 March. The Report recognises that non-consensual AI created digital replicas of someone's likeness can cause harm. The Government proposes to explore options to address potential risks from digital replicas including "whether a new personality right may be appropriate".[282]

225. The National Security Act 2023 foreign interference offence targets malign activity carried out for, on behalf of, or with the intention to benefit, a foreign power. This includes FIMI intended to manipulate public discourse, discredit the political system, and undermine the safety or interests of the UK. It specifically targets the actors, whilst the complementary Online Safety Act 2023 seeks to secure the online environment and regulate social media platforms. The foreign interference offence links the two pieces of legislation, requiring online platforms to act against foreign interference in line with their safety duties on illegal content, where it meets all three conditions of the foreign interference offence. To meet the threshold for committing the foreign interference offence in section 13(1) of the Act, three conditions must be met:

- **i.** the person's conduct, or a course of conduct of which it forms a part, must be intended to have an interference effect; (e.g. the effect of interfering with how a person participates in an election);
- **ii.** the conduct is 'prohibited conduct' [constitutes an offence or involves making a misrepresentation or coercion]; and
- **iii.** the foreign power condition is met in relation to the prohibited conduct.[283]

226. The foreign power condition is only met if the conduct (or a wider course of conduct that it forms part of) is carried out for or on behalf of a foreign power, and the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that is the case.[284] The offence does not however explicitly deal with right wing propaganda being pushed by biased social media algorithms or coordinated bots.

281 Q290 (Vijay Rangarajan)
282 HM Government, Report on Copyright and Artificial Intelligence, 18 March 2026, p.123
283 National Security Act 2023, Part 1 Foreign Interference
284 National Security Act 2023, Part 1 Foreign Interference

227. Attribution is a key challenge associated with the identification of activities that may constitute a foreign interference offence. This is increasingly difficult due to the use of bots, digital marketing companies and local content creators which obscure the involvement of state actors in influence operations and make it harder to conclusively attribute operations.[285] Further, there will additionally be circumstances wherein the Government may not wish to publicly attribute operations to a foreign power especially where there is a need to protect the sources of that information and its ability to maintain a competitive advantage over adversaries.

228. Dame Melanie Dawes, Chief Executive of Ofcom acknowledged the requirement to meet the three conditions in the foreign interference offence was a high bar and as a result "the threshold for platforms having to take action is high, as is the threshold for Ofcom holding platforms to account".[286]

229. The Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall KC has separately outlined his concerns about the foreign interference offence and that he would welcome legislation requiring greater transparency from social media platforms to minimise the potential of the platforms being "left to mark their own homework".[287]

230. **CONCLUSION**

By design, malign actors conduct foreign interference in a covert and obfuscating manner, including on social media platforms. We are concerned that the National Security Act 2023 foreign interference offence, which is critical in combatting malign activity online, is limited due to the need to establish that it is a foreign power behind the disinformation. We believe this makes the offence unworkable in practice and are concerned that social media companies may use the complexities of attribution to minimise their compliance. The Government should ensure that the foreign power condition does not create a loophole allowing hostile state-backed influence operations to evade enforcement.

285 UK-China Transparency (DIS0006); Ofcom, Consultation: Protecting people from illegal harms, Volume 2, Chapter 6P, 9 November 2023, pp.244–262

286 Correspondence with Ofcom relating to disinformation, 17 February 2026

287 Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, RUSI Speech: The foreign hand and foreign interference, 23 July 2024

231. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should conduct an urgent review of the National Security Act 2023 Foreign Interference Offence, a priority offence under the Online Safety Act 2023, to ensure it is fit for purpose given the difficulties in meeting the foreign power condition.

232. **RECOMMENDATION**
We welcome the Government's proposals to explore options to address potential digital replica harms including whether a new statutory regime of personality rights may be appropriate to protect individuals against the threat of deepfakes. At a minimum, the Government should ensure these personality rights cover a person's likeness, voice and body.

233. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should amend the Online Safety Act to oblige social media companies to provide transparency of user location. This should include publicly available information about 1) the region an account was created; 2) the region the account is based; and 3) whether the connection to the platform was via a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Social media companies should also be obliged to provide an opt-out function to safeguard users under the threat of transnational repression.

234. Dr Gabriela Borz, Dr Anna Longhini, and Thomas Montgomerie of University of Strathclyde and Babeș-Bolyai University highlighted that current electoral legislation does not require digital imprints to include any disclaimer about the accuracy of the content.[288]

235. Additional concerns have been raised about the use of cryptoassets to fund FIMI networks and other foreign interference techniques, as seen in Moldova (see Chapter 3), due to the ability to obfuscate the true source of the funds. Such concerns had led the Government to instruct Philip Rycroft CB to conduct an independent review into foreign financial interference in the UK's political and electoral systems.[289]

236. At present the UK does not preclude cryptoasset political donations and whilst Vijay Rangarajan CMG accepted that the "system is not yet good enough to obey electoral law with the clarity and transparency that we want" he cautioned that restricting cryptoasset political donations could lead to other forms of donations to be restricted like "artworks, services in

288 University of Strathclyde, Babeș-Bolyai University (DIS0041)
289 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Urgent review into foreign financial interference in UK politics, 16 December 2025

kind, buildings, foreign trips".[290] Vijay Rangarajan CMG instead advocated for setting "very clear rules and guidance for parties about what is acceptable".[291]

237. The Government introduced the Representation of the People Bill on 12 February 2026. The Bill seeks to implement policy objectives set out in the Government's Elections and Democracy policy paper of July 2025, including changes to the conduct of elections, political finance regulation and measures to address intimidation of candidates and election staff.[292] Whilst the Bill has taken important steps to reform electoral law, it does not propose controls of cryptoasset donations to political parties nor provisions to tackle disinformation such as banning deepfakes of candidates or social media algorithmic biasing for political advantage.[293]

238. **CONCLUSION**

We are concerned about the UK's legislative ability to withstand the kinds of threats reported during elections in other countries. We therefore welcome the Government's intention to legislate to protect the integrity of the UK's democratic processes and institutions through the Representation of the People Bill, but it does not go far enough to safeguard future elections.

239. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Government should include provisions in the Representation of the People Bill that tackle AI-generated content, the creation and dissemination of disinformation, limits on the potential abuse of social media algorithmic biasing for political advantage, and a ban on cryptoasset donations to political parties.

290 Qq328–329 (Vijay Rangarajan CMG)
291 Qq328–329 (Vijay Rangarajan CMG)
292 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections, 17 July 2025
293 Representation of the People Bill (as introduced), HC Bill 384 (2024–26)

Conclusions and recommendations

The Actors

1. Russia presents a clear and present threat to the UK, its overseas interests, and Euro-Atlantic security. The depth and intensity of hostile activity orchestrated by Russia across the West leaves us with no ambiguity. Russia's behaviour is that of a state at war against the West, and this will not change whilst Putin is in power. Therefore, it is vital that the Government ensures the UK and its allies harden their information ecosystems to make them an impenetrable and unattractive target of Russian interference. (Conclusion, Paragraph 25)

2. The UK must prioritise existing funds for civil society organisations and independent media to enhance their resilience and capacity across Europe, but especially around the Black Sea Region and the Western Balkans, to stem the flow of Russian influence and aggression. It should also step-up its counter foreign information manipulation and interference offering to allies in the Black Sea Region to ensure Russia cannot succeed in its attempts to influence election results. Failure to do so risks the potential for breaches of human rights and limits democracy. This would further threaten direct confrontation with NATO and European security. (Recommendation, Paragraph 26)

3. The Government has committed to a three C's approach to bilateral relations with China: compete, cooperate and challenge. Whilst we of course recognise the need to engage with China, the second largest economy in the world, this cannot come at the cost of trading security for economic growth. (Conclusion, Paragraph 36)

4. The Government must treat China the same as it treats any other state. It is therefore vital that the Government is transparent with Parliament and the public and outlines their strategy for engagement and the red lines for countering Chinese state influence, including the use of cyber-attacks and disinformation. (Recommendation, Paragraph 37)

5. Prior to the joint US and Israeli attack, the Iranian regime presented a clear and persistent threat to those opposing its world view. This has manifested in support for armed groups and terrorist organisations, and the transnational repression of critics. We support the Government's action in specifying Iran under the enhanced tier of the National Security Act 2023 Foreign Influence Registration Scheme. (Conclusion, Paragraph 45)

6. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Hybrid Threats Directorate should draw upon capabilities within the Department's Iranian regional teams to develop programming to counter foreign information manipulation interference campaigns emanating from Iran. (Recommendation, Paragraph 46)

7. We welcome the Government's actions to sanction the Russian information agency Africa Initiative and three of its leaders in July 2025, mirroring those implemented by the European Union in December 2024. (Conclusion, Paragraph 55)

8. We are concerned that the Global Coalition against Daesh's Counter Daesh Communications Cell, led by the UK, is not delivering as intended. Given the resurgence of Daesh in North Africa and the Middle East, it is imperative that tools to counter Daesh are effective. (Conclusion, Paragraph 58)

9. The Government should review its work through the Counter Daesh Communications Cell to ensure it is producing messaging that appeals to potential recruits. It should also increase efforts to identify credible partners on the ground who are best placed to deliver counter-Daesh narratives. (Recommendation, Paragraph 59)

The scale of foreign information manipulation and interference

10. For over four years, Ukraine has continued to resist an imperialist Russia determined to erase its sovereignty and destabilise European security. We commend the bravery and sacrifice of the Ukrainian people as they fight not only for their own freedom but for the security of Europe. We also applaud the substantial support the UK Government continues to provide in aiding Ukraine to counter Russian information warfare. (Conclusion, Paragraph 74)

11. For over a decade, Ukrainians have been resisting Russian information warfare and developing an arsenal of lessons learnt and best practices. It is therefore essential that Article 7 of the UK-Ukraine One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement is seen as a two-way street, so that the UK can both support Ukraine and learn essential lessons. We are additionally concerned that there have been limited details to date on the roadmap

for how and when activities will be undertaken or whether this Agreement will be amended in the event of a peace agreement with Russia. (Conclusion, Paragraph 75)

12. The Government should provide greater clarity on the progress made in implementing the One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement between the UK and Ukraine, including specific information on the operation and intent of Article 7, combatting foreign information manipulation and interference. It should also set out what discussions, if any, have taken place with Ukraine regarding potential amendments to the Agreement in the event that a peace settlement with Russia is reached. (Recommendation, Paragraph 76)

13. The Committee is deeply concerned about the continued deterioration of democracy in Georgia which, on its current trajectory, will lead to an entrenched autocracy firmly under Russia's sphere of influence, like Belarus. We condemn the actions of the Georgian Dream Government in suspending EU accession talks, repressing opposition voices, limiting legitimate protest, and spreading disinformation. These actions imitate the Russian playbook and indicate coordination between Tbilisi and Moscow. We support the actions already taken by the UK Government in sanctioning Georgian officials responsible for enabling human rights violations in response to legitimate protests. (Conclusion, Paragraph 83)

14. We call on the Government to implement new targeted financial and travel sanctions on Georgian Dream officials supporting the Foreign Agents Registration Act, Georgian kleptocrats and Georgian media organisation spreading disinformation. These additional designations would significantly increase the cost on those who are seeking to undermine the Georgian people's desire for a European alignment and signify the UK's support for Georgian democracy, not autocracy. (Recommendation, Paragraph 84)

15. Moldova, like Georgia, has faced concerted Russian interference in its politics, most visibly during the 2024 Presidential election and EU referendum and 2025 Parliamentary election. Yet on each occasion the Moldovan people have decisively rejected a turn toward Russia, choosing instead a European future. Moldova's resilience in the face of persistent Russian disinformation, electoral interference, illicit financing, and political subversion should serve as a lesson for the UK. The Committee saw firsthand the essential support the UK Government is providing to help Moldova counter these threats. We commend the work of the British Embassy in Chișinău and welcome the UK Government's continued commitment to ensuring that Moldova can safeguard its independence and pursue its chosen European path. (Conclusion, Paragraph 92)

16. The UK Government must support Moldova in its investigations into those actors which sought to undermine electoral integrity through cyber-attacks, fake bomb threats at polling stations and foreign information manipulation

and interference campaigns. This includes the UK sanctioning individuals and organisations responsible. The UK must make clear that there are consequences for those who sought to deliberately interfere in Moldova's democracy. (Recommendation, Paragraph 93)

17. The Western Balkans and Armenia face a range of foreign information and manipulation challenges seeking to distort public opinion, promote authoritarian alternatives, and destabilise its democracies. Stability in the Western Balkans is vital for European security and NATO cohesion, while Armenia deserves support for its efforts to move closer to Europe and the West. (Conclusion, Paragraph 99)

18. Working with the European Union, the UK Government should scale-up assistance for independent media, civil society organisations and media literacy whilst continuing to monitor and expose foreign influence operations in these regions. (Recommendation, Paragraph 100)

19. The West is increasingly retreating from Africa as it reduces overseas development aid to increase domestic spending on defence. However, this withdrawal is enabling malign actors like Russia and China to fill the vacuum and increase their influence on political, economic and security affairs. (Conclusion, Paragraph 106)

20. The Government should set out how it will ensure that reductions in overseas development aid and integrated security fund programming do not facilitate a vacuum that can be exploited by malign actors seeking advantage in Africa. We urge the Government to ensure appropriate funding is available to ensure resilient and sustainable independent media organisations are able to thrive across the African continent. (Recommendation, Paragraph 107)

21. Taiwan is under considerable pressure as China pursues targeted foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns to sway public opinion and change the terms of international diplomatic engagement. There are increasing concerns that increased hybrid attacks are setting the ground for increased destabilisation in the South China Sea, including the invasion of Taiwan. (Conclusion, Paragraph 114)

22. The Government must use all its diplomatic powers, alongside that of allies to deter Chinese disinformation targeting Taiwan. The Government should expand its bilateral relations with Taiwanese officials and civil society groups to better understand the information environment within the Indo-Pacific and sharing of best practice on countering foreign information manipulation and interference threats. (Recommendation, Paragraph 115)

23. The United States remains the UK's closest security and defence partner, yet the evolving political landscape in Washington has introduced new strains in transatlantic cooperation on countering foreign information manipulation and interference. While both countries acknowledge the threat posed by malign disinformation actors, the Trump Administration has placed significant emphasis on defending absolute freedom of speech and has criticised European and UK legislative initiatives as forms of censorship. This has led to the Trump Administration closing key US institutions, restricting funding for independent media and civil society organisations and instigating visa bans on prominent British and European anti-disinformation experts, whom the US government has accused of attempting to suppress American viewpoints through extraterritorial censorship. (Conclusion, Paragraph 127)

24. These tensions underscore the need for continued diplomatic dialogue with the United States. Without such efforts, divergent approaches risk weakening collective work on combatting foreign information manipulation and interference. In principle, the government should stand up for those countering disinformation, wherever in the world it occurs. (Recommendation, Paragraph 128)

25. Latin America's information environment is becoming increasingly contested, with foreign actors seeking to exploit regional divisions and anti-US sentiment. When combined with social media companies' limited moderation capacity in Spanish and Portuguese, the risk of anti-democratic interference increases. (Conclusion, Paragraph 134)

26. The Government must work with regional partners in Latin America to support independent media and strengthen cooperation with trusted civil society organisations recognising that instability in Latin America directly affects UK diplomatic, trade and security interests and should not be treated as peripheral to the Government's counter-FIMI strategy. The Government should ensure it has the required capacity to monitor the growing threat of foreign information manipulation and interference in the region. The Government should report to this Committee within six months on how it will strengthen UK monitoring, diplomatic engagement and democratic resilience partnerships in Africa, the Indo-Pacific, Europe and the Americas. (Recommendation, Paragraph 135)

FCDO's approach to countering foreign information manipulation and interference

27. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has acknowledged that its work on countering foreign information manipulation and interference has been limited to Europe due to funding constraints despite clear evidence that malign actors are exploiting weaker information environments in other strategically important regions. This limited funding risks the UK further losing influence in key regions such as Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Indo-Pacific as it cuts Official Development Assistance. This is especially concerning given the recent commitments by the Government to target funds to raising defence spending to achieve the NATO commitment of 3.5% of GDP by 2035 and the reorganisation of the UK Integrated Security Fund to deliver the ambitions of the National Security Strategy. Without immediate action, threat actors will continue to outspend democratic nations like the UK, increasing the challenge in combatting information operations. Strengthening the UK's soft power capability and combatting FIMI in the information war should be recognised as an integral part of the UK's defence and security strategy (Conclusion, Paragraph 141)

28. Given the importance of combatting foreign information manipulation and interference, it is unacceptable that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is presently under-resourced. The Government should immediately rectify this by utilising the funds associated with the defence uplift to increase funding and staffing within the newly formed Hybrid Threats Directorate. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office must have the necessary resources to ensure their critical work can be conducted across all regions of interest and take forward this ministerial priority. (Recommendation, Paragraph 142)

29. The need for media freedoms is greater today than it has been at any previous time. Limits are increasingly being placed on journalists which in turn endangers liberty. As funding for independent media organisations like the BBC World Service and Radio Free Europe are reduced, it is imperative that the democratic international community moves away from mere rhetoric and instead demonstrates meaningful defence of media freedoms. (Conclusion, Paragraph 147)

30. The Committee welcomes the announcement that the UK Government will become the new co-Chair of the Media Freedom Coalition in March 2026, following this Committee's suggestion to Ministers. This indicates that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office are serious about protecting media freedoms. However, under previous Governments, the

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office committed to providing six-monthly updates to this Committee on its work on media freedoms. These have now stopped. (Conclusion, Paragraph 148)

31. To show its continued commitment to media freedoms, the Government should again provide to the Committee six-monthly updates, including an assessment of threats to media freedom and the UK's response to foreign information manipulation and interference in priority regions. (Recommendation, Paragraph 149)

BBC World Service

32. The BBC World Service plays a critical role in providing life-saving information and updates during conflict and crisis, whilst leading the global fight against disinformation and promoting democratic values. Much of the evidence received by the Committee highlights the essential role of the BBC World Service and calls on the Government to ensure its continued functions through increased funding. We welcome the Government's announcement that it will increase funding of the BBC World Service by an additional £11 million per year for the next three years. It is essential that the BBC World Service is provided with the necessary funding to ensure it continues to tackle the threat of disinformation by providing independent, impartial journalism to a global audience. (Conclusion, Paragraph 159)

33. The Government must recognise that accurate, impartial news is essential to the UK's national security and overseas interests and should be treated by Government as a strategic national asset in an era of information warfare. At a time when the UK is reducing its Official Development Assistance and disinformation is spreading globally, the BBC World Service, is widely regarded as the world's most trusted international broadcaster. Whilst we welcome the additional funding being provided by the Government over the next three years, this is nominal increase but due to inflation is likely to be a flat settlement. Therefore, the Government should provide the BBC World Service with a further increased funding settlement, drawn in part from the defence budget, so it can plan, invest, and deliver its services effectively. It should also be made clear that funding from the Ministry of Defence would be provided with appropriate safeguards and commitments to ensure that the BBC World Service is able to continue to operate independent of Government. If the BBC World Service does not receive the funding it needs, it will continue to contract with a diminishing influence. Its loss would significantly diminish the UK's soft power and undermine our ability to counter information warfare. (Recommendation, Paragraph 160)

34. Artificial Intelligence's (AI) proliferation over the last few years has ushered a new digital era by invigorating research and innovation, whilst introducing unique challenges to national security. AI offers malicious users the opportunities to create novel content at speed, greatly increasing their reach and impact. However, it can also be deployed by defenders to analyse patterns, detecting campaigns before they can cause widespread harm. (Conclusion, Paragraph 164)

35. The Government should establish an AI counter disinformation sandbox to test the boundaries of regulation and technology. The sandbox should facilitate experimentation of AI tools across Whitehall, the intelligence community and trusted international partners. (Recommendation, Paragraph 165)

36. Tackling the threat of foreign information manipulation and interference requires dedicated and long-standing cooperation with allies. Whilst we welcome the Government's increased engagement with EU partners, there is a need to move faster and significantly increase coordination to deter malign actors. (Conclusion, Paragraph 171)

37. The Government should initiate the first UK-EU dialogue under the Security and Defence Partnership on foreign information manipulation and interference. The Government should also outline how it is using the Security and Defence Partnership and other bilateral agreements with EU partners to strengthen cooperation in detecting and responding to foreign information manipulation and interference to increase the cost for malign actors seeking to interfere in democracies. (Recommendation, Paragraph 172)

The UK's domestic response to foreign information manipulation and interference threats

38. It is our view that the Government has created an unnecessarily fragmented approach to countering foreign information manipulation and interference, with no one department or associated body taking overall leadership. This has created a system which seems to prioritise discussion and bureaucracy over action. A more effective model already exists. In 2016, the Government established the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), within GCHQ, bringing together government, intelligence agencies and the private sector into one organisation, providing expert advice and guidance on cyber security. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)

has significantly strengthened the UK's understanding of, and the response to, the most important cyber threats domestically and internationally. (Conclusion, Paragraph 180)

39. To ensure a whole-of-society approach, the Government should establish a public-facing National Counter Disinformation Centre. The UK's National Counter Disinformation Centre should be placed on a statutory footing, be subject to oversight by Parliament, and be directed to understand, identify and combat foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns being directed against the UK and its interests. The National Counter Disinformation Centre should be similar to Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation, and France's Vigilance and Protection against Foreign Digital Interference service (VIGINUM). (Recommendation, Paragraph 181)

40. The UK's overseas diplomatic presence is vital to understanding and countering foreign information manipulation and interference. We are concerned that at present the Government is not adequately utilising the expertise and evidence collated by its overseas network to inform its domestic approach to combatting foreign information manipulation and interference. (Conclusion, Paragraph 182)

41. The Government should in response to this report provide evidence to the Committee on how it utilises its overseas network to detect, defend and deter foreign information manipulation and interference and how these insights are informing policy responses. (Recommendation, Paragraph 183)

42. There is an apparent lack of public awareness about disinformation campaigns from foreign malign actors. By exposing the broader public to the threat of malicious content the Government can inoculate the target audience from the threat of disinformation. Public awareness campaigns are an easily accessible method for the government to spread reliable information across multiple channels and are under-utilised by the Government at present. It was suggested that publicising disinformation campaigns might do the malign actors' jobs for them and undermine confidence in essential democratic institutions and processes. If these campaigns posed no danger to our democracy and it can be said with complete confidence that these campaigns have no effect on public opinion, then we would have some sympathy with this approach. However, our experience tells us that we cannot afford to be complacent. To defeat this hybrid warfare we must enlist the public and empower them with the necessary tools to identify disinformation and make their own informed decisions. (Conclusion, Paragraph 187)

43. The government should launch a public awareness campaign to educate citizens about the risk of foreign information manipulation and interference. This should include the measures taken and mechanisms in place to protect

democratic institutions. Additionally, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office should launch a publicly accessible information portal to document the scale and aims of disinformation campaigns, similar to the European External Action Services' highly-effective EUvsDisinfo resource. (Recommendation, Paragraph 188)

44. We are concerned that the government is in part restricting public awareness regarding the threat of foreign information manipulation and interference due to an unwillingness to declassify intelligence. It is the Committee's opinion that there is a culture of secrecy and overclassification, especially for state threats which risk leaving Parliament and the public in the dark. (Conclusion, Paragraph 189)

45. Where examples would resonate with the public, the Government and the National Security Community should declassify information relating to foreign information manipulation and interference. In addition, the Government should provide Parliamentarians and other key stakeholders (e.g., civil society organisations and media organisations) with regular briefings on their work to combat foreign information manipulation and interference as well as training to identify and report disinformation campaigns. This should mirror the offerings provided by the National Cyber Security Centre for cyber security and resilience. (Recommendation, Paragraph 190)

Media literacy

46. The UK Government has indicated it will take an all-of-society approach through various commitments outlined in the Strategic Defence Review, National Security Strategy and the Resilience Action Plan. Yet media literacy was notably absent. Whilst we welcome the Government's media literacy action plan, it places no overt responsibilities on social media platforms to support efforts to improve media literacy and does not include actions to inform the public about foreign malign actors spreading disinformation. If this responsibility continues to sit with Ofcom, the Committee is concerned that it may lack the capacity to undertake this role. (Conclusion, Paragraph 199)

47. The Government must not overlook media literacy as part of its all-of-society approach to strengthening and securing the UK's national security, including foreign information manipulation and interference from malign actors. The Government should seek to learn best practice from Baltic and Nordic countries and apply them to the UK, ensuring its approach focuses on all ages, not just the under-16s. (Recommendation, Paragraph 200)

48. Social media companies are a key component in tackling the dissemination of foreign information manipulation and interference. It is our opinion that they are failing to tackle the threat of foreign interference on their platforms. The continued lack of algorithmic transparency by social media companies is restricting legitimate access by policymakers, academics and civil society who are seeking to examine how their content ranking systems are designed and potentially abused by malign actors posting controversial and incendiary content. This is not about policing content, but the design and processes used by online platforms to retain the engagement of users and its vulnerability to abuse. (Conclusion, Paragraph 215)

49. The Government should require social media companies to publish algorithmic transparency data (logic and biases), provide legitimate data access to researchers free of charge and without cumbersome restrictions, and oblige platforms to publish an annual report on the detection of artificial amplification and foreign interference and the subsequent actions taken to remove such content. (Recommendation, Paragraph 216)

50. By design, malign actors conduct foreign interference in a covert and obfuscating manner, including on social media platforms. We are concerned that the National Security Act 2023 foreign interference offence, which is critical in combatting malign activity online, is limited due to the need to establish that it is a foreign power behind the disinformation. We believe this makes the offence unworkable in practice and are concerned that social media companies may use the complexities of attribution to minimise their compliance. The Government should ensure that the foreign power condition does not create a loophole allowing hostile state-backed influence operations to evade enforcement. (Conclusion, Paragraph 230)

51. The Government should conduct an urgent review of the National Security Act 2023 Foreign Interference Offence, a priority offence under the Online Safety Act 2023, to ensure it is fit for purpose given the difficulties in meeting the foreign power condition. (Recommendation, Paragraph 231)

52. We welcome the Government's proposals to explore options to address potential digital replica harms including whether a new statutory regime of personality rights may be appropriate to protect individuals against the threat of deepfakes. At a minimum, the Government should ensure these personality rights cover a person's likeness, voice and body. (Recommendation, Paragraph 232)

53. The Government should amend the Online Safety Act to oblige social media companies to provide transparency of user location. This should include publicly available information about 1) the region an account was created; 2) the region the account is based; and 3) whether the connection to the platform was via a Virtual Private Network (VPN).

Social media companies should also be obliged to provide an opt-out function to safeguard users under the threat of transnational repression. (Recommendation, Paragraph 233)

54. We are concerned about the UK's legislative ability to withstand the kinds of threats reported during elections in other countries. We therefore welcome the Government's intention to legislate to protect the integrity of the UK's democratic processes and institutions through the Representation of the People Bill, but it does not go far enough to safeguard future elections. (Conclusion, Paragraph 238)

55. The Government should include provisions in the Representation of the People Bill that tackle AI-generated content, the creation and dissemination of disinformation, limits on the potential abuse of social media algorithmic biasing for political advantage, and a ban on cryptoasset donations to political parties. (Recommendation, Paragraph 239)

Formal minutes

Thursday 19 March 2026

Members present

Dame Emily Thornberry (Chair)

Fleur Anderson

Aphra Brandreth

Dan Carden

Edward Morello

Sir John Whittingdale

Disinformation diplomacy: How malign actors are seeking to undermine democracy

Draft Report (*Disinformation diplomacy: How malign actors are seeking to undermine democracy*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 239 read and agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 14 April at 10:00 a.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 11 February 2025

Professor Vera Tolz-Zilitinkevic, Sir William Mather Professor of Russian Studies, University of Manchester; **Dr Jon Roozenbeek**, Lecturer in Psychology and Security, King's College London; **Professor Martin Innes**, Director of the Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute, Police Science Institute and Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University Q1–42

Tuesday 1 April 2025

Salome Zourabichvili, Fifth President of Georgia Q43–72

Tuesday 16 September 2025

Grace Theodoulou, Policy Fellow (China Observatory), The Council on Geostrategy; **Mr Andrew Yeh**, Executive Director, China Strategic Risks Institute; **James Kynge**, Senior Research Fellow for China and the World, Chatham House Q73–111

Dr Antonio Giustozzi, Senior Research Fellow (Terrorism and Conflict), Royal United Services Institute (RUSI); **Dr Dani Madrid-Morales**, Lecturer in Journalism and Global Communication, The University of Sheffield Q112–135

Tuesday 18 November 2025

Nina Jankowicz, CEO, American Sunlight Project; **Roberta Braga**, Founder and Executive Director, Digital Democracy Institute of the Americas; **Jon Bateman**, Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Technology and International Affairs Programme, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Q136–152

Alexandre Brasil, Deputy Head of Mission, Brazilian Embassy in London Q153–163

Nishant Lalwani, CEO, International Fund for Public Interest Media Q164–180

Tuesday 6 January 2026

Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; **Jonny Hall CMG OBE**, Director, Hybrid Directorate, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Q181–247

Tuesday 13 January 2026

Ana Revenco, Director, Moldovan Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Q248–256

Ciaran Martin CB, Founding Chief Executive, National Cyber Security Centre Q257–285

Vijay Rangarajan CMG, Chief Executive, Electoral Commission Q286–339

Monday 9 March 2026

Ali Law, Director of Public Policy for Northern Europe, TikTok; **David Agranovich**, Director of Global Threat Disruption, Meta; **Wifredo Fernández**, Head of Americas, Global Government Affairs, X Corp. Q340–433

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

DIS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Anonymised	DIS0050
2	Antisemitism Policy Trust	DIS0004
3	BBC Media Action	DIS0047
4	BBC World Service	DIS0046
5	Ball, James	DIS0020
6	Ball, Professor Brian (Professor of Philosophy, Northeastern University London)	DIS0025
7	Berbridge, Daniel (Consultant, Creative Content Support Fund / Zinc Network / Chemonics)	DIS0036
8	Briant, Dr Emma L	DIS0044
9	Buckley, Professor Oli (Professor of Cyber Security, Loughborough University)	DIS0003
10	Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH)	DIS0032
11	Cogito Epistemology Research Centre; and MRC-University of Glasgow Centre for Virus Research	DIS0039
12	Cormac, Professor Rory (Professor of International Relations, University of Nottingham); and Lomas, Dr Dan (Assistant Professor of International Relations, University of Nottingham)	DIS0011
13	CyberUp Campaign	DIS0018
14	Embassy of Brazil in London	DIS0023
15	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)	DIS0029
16	Full Fact	DIS0045
17	Henry Jackson Society	DIS0021
18	Hong Kong Democracy Council	DIS0014

19	Hutchings, Dr Stephen (Professor of Russian Studies, University of Manchester); Tolz, Dr Vera (Professor of Russian Studies, University of Manchester); and Voronovici, Dr Alexandr (Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Manchester)	DIS0022
20	Jankowicz, Nina (CEO, American Sunlight Project)	DIS0054
21	KCMG, Sir William Browder (CEO; Head, Hermitage Capital Management; Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign)	DIS0031
22	King's College London	DIS0016
23	Logically	DIS0028
24	London Politica	DIS0034
25	Madrid-Morales, Dr Dani (Lecturer in Journalism and Global Communication, The University of Sheffield)	DIS0052
26	Madrid-Morales, Dr Dani (Lecturer, University of Sheffield)	DIS0035
27	Matthews, Dr William (Senior Research Fellow for China and the World, Chatham House); and Bland, Ben (Director, Asia-Pacific Programme, Chatham House)	DIS0010
28	Morley-Davies, Mr Jonathan (Research Manager, Albany Associates Int Ltd)	DIS0019
29	Munk, Dr Tine (Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Nottingham Trent University)	DIS0008
30	Newman, Professor Saul (Professor of Politics, Goldsmiths, University of London)	DIS0005
31	Nordsint	DIS0048
32	Online Safety Act Network	DIS0007
33	Platts, Caroline (PhD candidate, Cardiff Metropolitan University)	DIS0049
34	Rangarajan CMG, Vijay (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission)	DIS0055
35	Russell, Caileigh (Student, Edge Hill University); and Weatherburn, Ella (Student, Edge Hill University)	DIS0012
36	ShePersisted	DIS0027
37	Stetka, Dr Vaclav (Reader in Comparative Political Communication, Loughborough University); and Mihelj, Professor Sabina (Professor of Media and Cultural Analysis, Loughborough University)	DIS0009
38	The Alan Turing Institute (CETaS)	DIS0030

39	Theodoulou, Grace (Policy Fellow (China Observatory), The Council on Geostrategy)	DIS0051
40	Theodoulou, Grace (Policy Fellow, China Observatory, Council on Geostrategy)	DIS0037
41	UK-China Transparency	DIS0006
42	United Against Nuclear Iran	DIS0042
43	University College London	DIS0024
44	University of Nottingham; and Bellingcat	DIS0002
45	University of Strathclyde; and Babes-Bolyai University	DIS0041
46	Ure, Dr Adam (Director, Lvivski)	DIS0038

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
3rd	From a Common Understanding to Common Ground: Building a UK-EU Strategic Partnership fit for the future	HC 857
2nd	The write to protect: Britain's pen on the world stage	HC 930
1st	Israel-Palestine conflict	HC 488
2nd Special	The write to protect: Britain's pen on the world stage: Government Response	HC 1530
1st Special	Israel-Palestine conflict: Government Response	HC 1374